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CANADIAN LITERATURE No. 7

Winter, 1961

The Unwitting Elegiac

BY PAUL WEST

A Mirror of Moore

BY JACK LUDWIG

Original Relations

BY R. E. WATERS

Annual Supplement

A CHECKLIST OF
CANADIAN LITERATURE, 1960

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Drawings and Decorations in this issue
are by GEORGE KUTHAN.

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A RECORD WRIT IN AIR

ONE OF THE FAMILIAR COMMENTARIES on life and literature during the past generation has been the radio talk, and, despite the territory won by television, there is no reason to suppose that it will not remain an important vehicle of ideas and impressions and information. In Canada—and particularly through such programmes as *Critically Speaking* and *Anthology*—the radio talk has been one of the means of developing a mature standard of literary criticism. But perhaps its greatest achievement has been a more general one—the creation over the years of a kind of mosaic record of a country's life and thought, its manners and opinions, its arts and sciences.

Unfortunately in Canada that record has been almost entirely writ in air. The talk is spoken and heard and passes fugitively away, its only residue the typescripts that lie in the CBC archives, and the dwindling memories of the listeners. Publishers will rarely handle radio talks, and their disinclination may be justified to the extent that such a conversational kind of writing does not lend itself to the solemnity of stiff covers. This, however, does not mean that the radio talk is unpublishable. The long record of *The Listener* in Britain shows emphatically that the reverse is true, and that the periodical collection of talks can form a magazine that is rich and varied as few other periodicals can afford to be. If one had to prepare a history of British attitudes and tastes and interests over the past thirty years, one might well begin with the files of *The Listener*, for there, more than in any more profound or more single-minded periodical, the changing identity of the nation over those decades would lie concealed.

We have no similar magazine in Canada, and it is only exceptionally that our radio talks find their way into print. One of the exceptions is the programme known as *University of the Air*. I have beside me now half-a-dozen attractively presented pamphlets, each containing a series of talks delivered in that pro-

gramme. They range from Paul West's reflections on the growth of the novel to W. G. Hardy's reconstruction of the world of classical antiquity, from Lewis Walmsley's interpretation of China and the Chinese to William Robbins' discussion of humanistic values in English literature. These scripts vary a great deal in quality. Some of the speakers have fallen into the cardinal academic sin of condescension, and have chosen a talking-down superficiality which experienced radio hands know is not expected or liked by the seasoned listener; others have presented models of condensation and clarity; even the least satisfying of the pamphlets is informative and provocative enough to have been worth printing and preserving.

This experiment in publication has, I gather, been as successful commercially as in other ways; without the distributive organisation which commercial publishers have at their command, the CBC has sold an average of between 2,000 and 3,000 copies of each of these pamphlets at prices in the middle paperback range (75c to \$1.00). This success is encouraging, not merely to the CBC Publications Branch, but also to all who regret that so many excellent radio talks are heard and forgotten. It prompts one to ask for more of the same thing, more paperback collections perpetuating worthwhile series in other programmes, and, ultimately, a CBC magazine on the lines of *The Listener*.

I have been raising the question of such a magazine with CBC executives on and off for the past decade, and I have gathered that the principal obstacle has lain in the opposition of Canadian publishers of commercial periodicals, who have feared that a periodical sponsored by a government corporation would be a formidable competitor. Such an attitude is illogical and short-sighted, and has robbed the Canadian public of much more than it has given them. Since our commercial magazines, with their notoriously low estimate of the intelligence of reading Canadians, do not customarily publish the kind of material that is used in serious radio talks—particularly those concerned with literature and the arts—there would clearly have been no direct competition, in the sense of similar magazines struggling for the same public; obviously a Canadian *Listener* would have been quite different in character from any existing homebred popular periodical. But perhaps it was a more dangerous form of competition, the competition of better and more interesting material, that our commercial periodical publishers feared; perhaps they foresaw that the success of a CBC magazine containing intelligent talks would expose the shallowness of their own achievements.

One might in fact hazard the opinion that, had there been a good CBC-sponsored magazine operating in Canada over the past thirty years, the general

level of our periodicals would have been forced up by example, and that the American magazines whose competition has been given so much prominence during the recent proceedings of the Royal Commission on Publications would not have established the dominance they now hold on our magazine stands, a dominance which we must reluctantly attribute to the fact that they have done their work more skilfully and attractively than their Canadian counterparts.

Now, it seems, the attitude of Canadian magazine publishers has changed. In their demands before the Royal Commission on Publications for protection against American periodicals, there has been a hint of willingness to grant the desirability of free competition in Canada, of a more-native-periodicals-the-better attitude. Without desiring to take part in the politics of mass media, or to judge the veering commercial point of view, we would point out that such a change of attitude seems to leave the CBC free to enter the field of periodical publication with something of more permanent value than *CBC Times*. We hope the opportunity will not be missed, and that at last a systematic publication and perpetuation of our best radio talks can begin. Nothing would contribute more usefully to that "development of a Canadian identity through a genuinely Canadian periodical press", which was named as one of the aims lying behind and beyond the appointment of the Royal Commission on Publications.

Let us, then, have our Canadian counterpart of *The Listener*. But more good things than talks are lost upon our northern air. In *Canadian Literature* No. 5 Gerald Newman remarked that our "important dramatic writing" is done largely for "media other than the stage", that is to say, for radio and television. Every year several good original plays are among those produced by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation; very few of these find their way into print. Again, there seems to be the idea that such publications are not commercially profitable. This has not been the experience of other countries. For several years now a Frankfurt publisher has been bringing out the *Hörspielbuch*, an annual anthology of plays produced on West German radio networks; the continued appearance of these yearly volumes suggests that they find a sufficient and faithful public. It is certainly worth an experiment to see if there may not be a similar public in Canada for radio plays of lasting worth; this is another function which the CBC Publications Branch might assume, either independently or in collaboration with the commercial publishers.

R. E. Watters

The substance of this paper was originally prepared as a lecture given during a tour of Australian universities made possible by the generosity of the Humanities Research Council of Australia and the hospitality of the universities themselves. On June 30, 1959, it was delivered as a Commonwealth Literary Fund Lecture at Canberra University College.

DURING THE PAST fifteen years the world has witnessed a swiftly rising wave of interest in the literatures of the British Commonwealth. Half a dozen North American libraries are rapidly acquiring extensive collections; bibliographies have appeared in the literatures of Australia, Canada and New Zealand, as well as on Indian fiction in English; and every week sees new titles in fiction and poetry not only from these countries but also from such regions as the West Indies and Africa. Each of these emerging literatures can be considered a tributary to a larger stream—the stream not of English literature, to be sure, but of literature in English. The literature of the United States—which happens to be outside the Commonwealth—is increasingly influential everywhere, even in Great Britain itself. But the stream is steadily widening. If few signs exist as yet of mutual influences among these newer literatures, there is certainly an increasing awareness of one another, and before long the readers and writers of one Commonwealth country will recognize that they can profit much from fuller acquaintance with the literatures of the others.

In this paper I shall concern myself only with the two senior members of the overseas Commonwealth, Australia and Canada, and consider the backgrounds of their two literatures as reflected in a few significant philosophical and social themes current in the fiction of the two countries. Despite some similarities both superficial and profound, Australians are not Canadians, and Australian fiction

ORIGINAL RELATIONS

A Genographic Approach to The Literatures of Canada and Australia

reflects the thoughts and feelings of a people whose land, history and way of life differ significantly and emphatically from the Canadian.

In literary studies national characteristics are often discounted if not entirely disregarded. Yet the physical, social, and spiritual environment surrounding a writer must inevitably enter into the substance of what he says and also affect his very manner of expression, his style and form. Therefore, when readers assume, as they often do, that an Australian or Canadian writer is trying to do what an English or American writer would try to do ("and not succeeding so well" is the stock inference), the conclusion may be ignored but the erroneous assumption on which it is based must be challenged. Two essays by Arthur A. Phillips in his *The Australian Tradition* suggest the needed corrective. Analyzing the work of Henry Lawson and Joseph Furphy, Mr. Phillips refutes orthodox critics by demonstrating that what they had called "weaknesses" in the fictional techniques of these two writers were actually brilliant adaptations of imported forms to native substance, and completely integrated with their essentially Australian subject matter and point of view. The critics who had uncritically applied alien standards were making erroneous assumptions about work whose unique nature they had not seriously tried to understand. The same errors flourished in the United States a century ago when uniquely American writers like Thoreau, Whitman, and Twain won far less favour from contemporary academic critics

than skilful but unimportant imitators of the then dominant British tradition and practice.

When American literature was struggling out of its adolescence, Ralph Waldo Emerson posed a question: "Why should not Americans enjoy an original relation to the universe?" A few years later, Walt Whitman was to assert that his countrymen were at fault when they looked at their country and their literature through eyes distorted by foreign values and interests. By doing so they saw only that the United States lacked much that Europe had, whereas unimpeded vision might more usefully detect what the States had that Europe lacked.

It is not too soon to ask whether Canadians and Australians also enjoy original relations to the universe, possess some things with literary implications which other countries lack—not entirely, perhaps, but relatively. The originality might be some special point of view towards aspects of human life which may exist everywhere but are observed nowhere so clearly or profoundly as in Canada or Australia. To consider such a possibility means that for at least a little while we should stop listening to complaints that our young literatures lack certain dimensions of the human spirit found abroad: certain types of intellectual complexity, for example, or certain nuances of sensitivity and refinements of emotions, or certain aspects of spiritual and religious intensity. Such stock complaints are never accompanied by a relevant question: have these approved qualities been gained in older literatures only after the loss of other desirable qualities? Are they, in short, gains counterbalanced by losses?

Remembrance of things past is more frequent in those with a brighter past than future, nuances in sensitivity are treasured most by those whose senses have become jaded, and some forms of intellectual complexity seem substitutes for an enfeebled imagination or atrophied muscles. Are the processes of age necessarily better suited to literature than those of youth? Is *The Wasteland* so obviously superior to *The Canterbury Tales*? Admittedly, both Australian and Canadian literatures are frequently concerned with exploring the spirit or character of our peoples as national groups and with attempting to discern and absorb the essential characteristics of our geography and history. Why not, since the possibility exists that something new in the world may be discovered? Every national literature seems to have gone through a comparable process and period. Youth is not directly in competition with age, for youth may be doing things that age has forgotten how to do, or has never done, or has done differently. Every young nation may find itself enjoying an original relation to the universe.

WHEREAS CANADA is merely the northern half of a continent, Australia is geographically unique, and isolated as no country has ever been, except New Zealand. Far away from distracting influences and freed from close supervision or control, the Australians were able to construct their own national myths and prototypes well before the first world war. Canada has never enjoyed any period at all comparable. To Canada, the mother country was always close, and the United States even closer, with neither geographical nor linguistic barriers between. Within the precarious present we have become sharply aware of the nuclear squeeze from above and below. Since infancy, then, Canada has been unlike Australia, in being always beset by varied external pressures and influences. We have never been isolated enough.

Australian literature, around the turn of this century, displays a widespread Utopian faith that a new and better society might be built in the Southern Hemisphere, far away from the wars and miseries of the Old World. Similar aspirations are found in American literature beginning with the first settlement and long continuing. Canadian literature reveals no such optimistic dream-time, for Canadians have never been able to dream—or dream for more than a moment—that they were in full control of their total destiny. Far from expanding in untrammelled visions of the future, Canadians have been advancing one step at a time, balancing this gain against that loss, this promise against that threat, the horizontal British attraction against the vertical American one. Such a way of life has its own exhilaration, but not the exhilaration of rhapsodic vision or of any “damn the consequences” type of heroic adventure. More goes on in the mind and muscles of the tightrope walker than meets the eye of the casual onlooker, and this fact is quite in keeping with the world’s opinion that, by contrast with either Australians or Americans, Canadians appear to be a pretty sober if not colourless body of people—at least outwardly. Our literature, too, shares the contrast, for it tends less towards either exuberance or violence than towards lonely endeavour, introspection, and ironic undertones.

In history, too, Australia and Canada possess soil for distinctive literary harvests. I am not referring to dramatic incidents or heroic individuals which are to be found in the history of each country and which supply each literature with specific subject matter or allusions or symbolic imagery. Instead, I wish to examine one or two examples of what might be called “sensitive areas” or, perhaps better, “sensitizing factors”, which seem to have produced original responses in both the life and literature of each people. They are “sensitive areas” because

they are subjects we are sometimes touchy about, sometimes deliberately exclude from our consciousness. Yet they are also "sensitizing factors" because they refine or colour our outlook, affect subconsciously perhaps our interpretation of things. To literature they can be like the irritant grains of sand that produce the pearls.

First but not the most important of these sensitive areas is our treatment of the original native inhabitants of our two lands. Neither Canadians nor Australians find much comfort in this subject, even though our current efforts may mark a great advance over those of our ancestors. Nevertheless, rationalize all we will, reiterate endlessly that if it hadn't been us it would have been someone else, we still cannot wholly erase our hidden knowledge that, by our own ethical code, might is never right, and therefore we have no legitimate moral claim whatever to the lands from which we displaced the original inhabitants. To be sure, such displacement has happened in most if not all countries—usually so long ago that no discernible trace is left on the conscience of present generations. Victor and victim have long since assimilated. But in a handful of countries, including ours, the event is so recent that it is still a sensitive and sensitizing fact.

I am not at all concerned here with advocating or disapproving the literary use of Indian or aboriginal myths, terminology, or cultural customs or symbols, though one might perhaps mention, in passing, that Canadian literature has never had a literary movement like that of the *Jindyworobaks*, a group of Australian writers who consciously sought to absorb and express in literature their extensive awareness of aboriginal lore and language. What interests me more is the literary treatment of the interrelationships, past and present, between original inhabitants and white intruders.

In North America the Indians were often a highly formidable enemy, unlike the far more primitive aborigines of Australia, and the violent feelings they provoked in generations of white North Americans have notably affected the literary treatment of the subject. North American Indians have provided the substance for a host of "adventure" stories of all the popular sorts, but they have occasioned little true literature. American and Canadian treatment of the Indian in both life and literature has, however, by no means been identical. That "the only good Indian is a dead Indian" was an American, not a Canadian, aphorism. Our history contains the names of many good Indians who were neither traitors to their own people nor sycophants of the white man's way of life, and our literature, in turn, tends to avoid the diabolized stereotypes of American frontier fiction. Nevertheless, surprisingly few Canadian novels of literary merit have been written about Indian-white relationships of either yesterday or today.

In Australia, on the contrary, the results have been much richer. Only there has it been possible to observe and interpret the consequences of juxtaposing the stone age and the 19th or 20th centuries. Latent are many original interconnections of space and time and spirit of hardly less significance than exploring the jaded sensibilities of bohemians in flight from suburbia. Relationships between the intruder and the dispossessed in Australia encompass implications and complications of greater literary effectiveness, perhaps, than those in North America. One reason may be that the sensitive Australian conscience cannot be so easily calcified by the ready rationalization of self-defence; another that because the stereotypes of embattled conflict were clearly impossible the subject attracted only authors of higher abilities. Moreover, the greater disparity between aborigine and white, the formidable racial, social, and cultural barriers to be scaled, also make for power and poignancy. Consider simply the subject of sexual love. In Canadian fiction, a white man who rejects or deserts an Indian girl must be either a snob or a cad, both stock figures who cannot seriously engage the sympathetic self-identification of a reader for long. I do not recall a single good Canadian novel about an Indian-white love affair. The same interracial situation in Australia forms the substance of several excellent works, including Susannah Prichard's *Coonardoo*, Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia*, and Mary Durack's *Keep Him My Country*.

TO AUSTRALIANS, a sensitive area and sensitizing factor of far greater significance than their relation to the aborigines is what has been called convictism, a term which not only embraces the historical facts about the transportation and treatment of convicted felons but also implies certain complex social and psychological consequences which long outlived the ending of the system. There was a time when Australian sensitivity about this portion of their history was such that both historians and the general public tended to minimize the alleged consequences upon Australian life, and to deplore the fascination the convict system exerted upon producers and consumers of popular fiction. Within recent years the attitude has changed to one that is both less emotional and more profound. Convictism is indeed far from providing the whole explanation of Australian characteristics, but it cannot be ignored for its share in creating certain features that distinguish Australian society from societies lacking this historical factor.

Leaving aside the colourful possibilities for romantic and realistic literary treatment of the convict system itself, one may still look for surviving consequences of great literary significance. For example, what were the lasting effects upon the life and outlook of the *free* settlers of having for two or three generations in their midst and under their control convicted persons as servants and laborers? Again, what was the effect upon the convicts themselves of serving out their sentences not within walls, as in other societies, but in the open air, doing things of indispensable social usefulness instead of routine drudgery, and in continuous daily contact with free people who could hardly survive without them? Though the convict's present was certainly bound up with his master's, his ultimate future was not, for he was not a slave; nor was he distinguishable by colour, education, or culture. The convict's wife (or husband) might be a free settler to whom the convict was assigned for the duration of the sentence. In any event the children of convicts, whether legitimate or illegitimate, were born free. For the first forty years of Australian settlement, free settlers were outnumbered by persons either still under sentence or emancipated on completion of their sentences.

Obviously, this unique situation must have occasioned reflections of an original sort about the nature of society, of justice, of crime and punishment; about the authority of those in control yet dependent upon the controlled; about the rights and social status of those who made laws, those who enforced laws, and those who violated laws; about the privileges of property and the powers of propertyless workers. Though the convict system existed for not more than two or three generations, the results of this sensitizing factor in Australia's formative years are still discoverable.

In his recent book *The Australian Legend* Russel Ward has clearly demonstrated some of these consequences. They are not all to be found, however, in overt social patterns, for such a unique historical experience can sensitize or colour a people's outlook and give a different aspect to common human situations. The "universal" theme of the individual's relation to his community frequently becomes in Australian fiction notably different from the way it appears in British, American, or Canadian writing. And unless such differences in point of view are recognized in criticism, and properly weighted, an author's characters may easily be judged as "weak", or "confused", or "implausible" simply because they behave differently from the supposed norm of the critic's own society.

In Great Britain, for instance, the class structure of society has been a sensitizing factor of great literary significance. Among other things, it has motivated much reflection about the "universals" of human nature which transcend distinctions

based on birth or family. Consider the recurrence in British literature of the concept that "a man's a man for a' that", or that Judy O'Grady and the Colonel's lady are sisters under the skin, or that a girl of the lower classes such as Pamela or Tess merits treatment enjoyed as a matter of course by a girl of the upper classes. In the literatures of the United States, Canada, and Australia we are not expected to feel astonishment at so original a moral discovery. In these three societies a colonel's lady could quite easily be Judy's sister in fact as well as femininity. In Britain the obvious social differences have impelled a quest for similarities or universals, whereas in the other societies the obvious similarities have invited a search for differences.

In the United States a principal factor has been slavery, with manifold but still largely unexplored consequences in American society and general outlook. For over two hundred years Americans lived with slaves in their midst before Lincoln gave them legal freedom, and this historical experience has marked their society as indelibly as convictism has done the Australian. In American literature one consequence has been an incessant concern with questions of liberty in all its ramifications: free will versus determinism, individual freedom versus social and moral conventionalism, untrammelled "free enterprise" versus "socialized" or public enterprise. The generations following the war that freed the slaves saw the rise of the literary movement called "Naturalism", the philosophic centre of which concerns the problem of personal freedom, or lack of it, amidst a variety of environmental controls. A frequent theme in American fiction has long been the individual gripped by a situation for which he is not responsible and from which he wishes to free himself, often by severing his bonds and running away physically or spiritually to search for a new life elsewhere. The parallel to the fate and hope of one born into slavery is obvious.

This kind of theme is rare in both Canadian and Australian literatures. Unlike a slave, a convict was born free, was responsible for his own servitude, and in time would regain his original freedom. In neither Australian nor Canadian literature has Naturalism been an important movement. Vertical relationships between God and creature, master and slave, have been of less concern than horizontal relations between equals and potential equals. Problems of fate and freedom give place to problems of fraternity and isolation.

Neither slaves nor convicts were significant in Canadian historical experience, but we have a sensitizing factor uniquely our own, with far-reaching consequences in our national life and literature. From our earliest years, we have had a large French-speaking group anxious to maintain its identity against influences

from the conquering British and the neighbouring Americans. In the 1780's these original Canadians were joined by the Loyalists who had been expelled from the new-born United States but who had no wish to cross the Atlantic and become Englishmen. These newcomers might be separated by language from *les canadiens* but they were firmly united with them in wishing to be something different from either the English or the Americans. Since then, apart from some invasions during the War of 1812 and the Fenian border raids half a century later, Canada has never feared for her national liberty but has never been free of fear for her separate identity.

From the beginning Canadians have lived within a complex network of circumstances and influences internal and external, historical and geographical, not of our own making, to be sure, but certainly of our own choice. Escape from the tensions we experience has always been possible but never chosen. Although hundreds of thousands of individual Canadians have migrated south of the border, the remarkable thing may well be not that the number is so great but that it is not far greater! To remain as we are and become what we want to become in our own way has always cost Canadians more in both money and effort than if we accepted the apparent logic of geographic, economic, cultural, or military arguments.

To the onlooker, there may well be something pathetic or even absurd in the incessant Canadian desire to feel and assert a difference between ourselves and our American brothers; our difference from the English no longer needs argument. The outsider readily sees the many "American" similarities but few if any of the alleged differences. But while feelings are not visible, they can be profoundly important, regardless of whether or not their foundations may appear dubious or illusory. The feeling of difference, even the mere wish to be different, can have consequences, and some of them may be found in our literature.

With unusual frequency our authors depict individuals struggling to achieve some personal goal while resisting pressures or attractions of various kinds from their environments. The characters are not shown as seeking escape *from* a shackling situation, however; rather they are shown as attempting to achieve or preserve some separate purpose or identity *within* the social complex. In this light consider the central characters of such varied novels as Birney's *Turvey*, Callaghan's *More Joy In Heaven* or *The Loved and the Lost*, MacLennan's *The Precipice* or *The Watch that Ends the Night*, Grove's *The Master of the Mill*, Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley*, Peterson's *The Chipmunk*, Richler's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, and Gabrielle Roy's *The Cashier*. It should

not surprise us that even a popular novelist like Mazo de la Roche should employ the same theme as the basis of the entire *Jalna* series; the characteristic family identity of the Whiteoaks is shown persisting through more than a century despite changing social and economic pressures of various kinds and despite inter-marriage with Americans and British through the generations.

The hero of an American novel may be an implausible weakling if he doesn't cut loose from his social shackles and take to the open road to seek his private New Jerusalem, whereas the Canadian may well prove himself a weakling if he does. The Australian character who seeks a personal goal by deserting or resisting his former companions or their values is seldom the hero but often the villain. Instead of people entangled in inherited or environmental social patterns beyond their control, Australian literature tends to present people in interdependence within a group, which may of course be at odds with another group; it explores such problems as limitations on authority or privilege, forgiveness of sins, the nature of justice, of loyalty, of "mateship". Neither Canada nor Australia have folk heroes like Washington and Lincoln who established national liberty and personal liberty respectively, for such achievements were unnecessary in our societies. In Canada, Montcalm who resisted is as much honoured as Wolfe who overcame him. As we begin to understand Sir John A. Macdonald better we see him as the quintessential Canadian who maintained and achieved his dream by adroit manœuvrings through a welter of pressures and influences, and in defiance of apparently unanswerable logic. Canada has no folk hero remotely like Australia's Ned Kelly, the outlaw who was unshakeably loyal to his mates and his class, but implacably hostile to the police, who in their turn appear to be less the arm of society than an alien third power. The chief folk hero in Australia, however, is no particular individual but rather a composite or type figure of the foot-loose workman, going where and when he lists, sure of the necessity for and value of his skilled labour when he chooses to work, sure also of assistance from his "mates" when personal misfortune strikes. For decades, the overwhelming majority of Australians have lived in large urban centers, but their folk hero is still the nameless swagman, the independent, propertyless but skillful rural itinerant burdened only with his blanket roll or waltzing matilda. He wears no man's collar but he is always spiritually, socially, and culturally supported by the sense of fraternal community with his fellows. He feels no need either to compete with them or to resist their influence upon him.

MORE DIFFERENCES in national attitudes towards "universal" human situations can be found than I have been able to touch on here. Examination of the humour or the poetry produced in Canada and Australia would provide further evidence. To describe all the national peculiarities and trace their genesis will require a far more wide-ranging study than anyone has yet made, but not until their intrinsic character is understood can the literary accomplishment of either country stand revealed for whatever it may prove to be worth. Meanwhile, the most useful hypothesis, I believe, derives from Emerson: that Canadians and Australians, like the Americans, may enjoy an original relation to the universe. Our task is to discover what this is.

Still to be answered is why our two literatures have only recently begun to attract attention. If "originality" is what matters, why has world interest been so tardy and so tepid? In reply one might fairly point out that literary history contains many examples of inadequate appreciation resulting from faulty understanding. To their contemporaries, Gower seemed as important as Chaucer, Longfellow more important than Whitman. When eventually the direction of a new development is perceived, the true worth of the early pathfinders can be understood and acknowledged. Only then do most readers and critics really scrutinize the work with sufficient care and humility to discover what has all along been its essential quality. What is most original in the outlook, assumptions, and values of an emerging literature or pathfinding author is often the very feature that provokes contemporary misjudgment or dismissal.

Taking possession of a new land psychologically is a far slower process than merely occupying it physically. In the United States more than two centuries had to elapse before the imported literary tradition was sufficiently transformed to begin producing a native literature, and the fact that a new and different literature was indeed emerging was not recognized, even by many Americans themselves, until the present century. That such a development was even a possibility was quite inconceivable to an English critic in 1820, the year Sydney Smith asked his rhetorical question: "In the four quarters of the world, who ever reads an American book?"

I am not for a moment trying to insinuate that within a century Canadian or Australian literature will be as firmly established, as important, or as well known as American literature now is. Neither country will then be as populous, as rich, as powerful as the present United States. Yet little gift of prophecy is required to claim that in the world of nations the status of the two Commonwealth countries

will continue to rise, and that attention will be increasingly accorded to their literatures. However, those literatures will require, I believe, a longer time than American literature needed to emerge to full maturity. The intellectual climate of their adolescence, for one thing, has been far more complex. Even if we could disregard the vastly increased cultural interrelationships with the non-English-speaking world, the fact would remain that in Canada and Australia an emerging literature must reconcile and transform literary importations from not one but two established literatures in English.

One advantage is nevertheless possessed by those Canadians and Australians who desire a mature literature for their countries. The American example has shown that the way of growth is likely to be found in differences from the imported stock rather than in similarities. Whether it comes from one or many sources, whatever is imported is likely to be sterile until it is transformed to suit the new geographical and historical and social environment. Therefore the sooner we begin to understand the original nature of our own relations to the universe, the sooner we may learn in what directions lie our literary futures.



A MIRROR OF MOORE

Jack Ludwig

BRIAN MOORE'S FICTIONAL WORLD is largely a matter of mirrors: a recurrent scene in each of his novels has a character facing his face in the mirror which is *not* magic, and the question asked is: "Mirror, mirror on the wall, have I any right to life at all?" The mirror's plain unmagic answer is the substance of Moore's novels.

So at the beginning of *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* the mirror moment sets the crisis, the let's-face-it scene:

Her angular face smiled softly at its glassy image. Her gaze, deceiving, transforming her to her imaginings, changed the contour of her sallow-skinned face, skilfully re-fashioning her long pointed nose on which a small chilly tear had gathered. Her dark eyes, eyes which skittered constantly in imagined fright, became wide, soft, luminous. Her frame, plain as a cheap clothes-rack, filled now with soft curves, developing a delicate line to bosom.

She watched the glass, a plain woman, changing all to the delightful illusion of beauty. There was still time . . .

But at the end of the novel Judith Hearne must return to mirrors and *see*, now without hope of time or change:

She sat at the bare white dressing-table and saw her face in the mirror. Old, she thought, if I met myself now, I would say: that is an old woman.

Moore's second novel, *The Feast of Lupercal*, has the mirror "truth" joined by another truth—the cavesdrop. His hero Diarmud Devine is existentially arrested by hearing himself called an "old woman":

He made straight for the washbasin in a hurried ritual of hand washing, hand shaking and hand drying, all the time staring shamefaced at his image in the mirror opposite.

When Devine finds a young girl and a chance at "life" he blunders and blusters, confused and confounded, and, while they are both preparing to make love, takes quick stock of himself in the Moore way:

He . . . looked in the dresser mirror. The face which looked back was weak with fright

But now, in the dresser mirror, his long pale body was shamefully exposed. His legs seemed knock-kneed and his hair was tousled like an idiot's.

In Judith Hearne and Diarmud Devine the truth paralyzes. Life tests by making love possible. The faint of heart end in fear and loneliness: the young girl with whom Devine could not make it is his accusation of failure at the end of the book: she is his mirror now: "She was right, he couldn't change. For the rest of his life he'd go on telling people what they wanted to hear."

Moore's third and best book, *The Luck of Ginger Coffey*, probably the finest novel Canada has seen, uses mirrors to set up soliloquies, to add a dimension missing in the other two novels, a personal style, a unique voice; Ginger is the suffering ham, the corny sentimentalist, the confused failure, but, as always, *facing it*: Judith Hearne's "There was still time" has been replaced by a *Juno and the Paycock* character's wish, "Maybe today his ship would come in." But the mirror on the wall is relentless:

His image in the dresser mirror looked at him: large, trembling . . . Look at yourself, would you. Take a good look.

He looked at him. A stupid man, dressed up like a Dublin squire. Looked at the frightened, childish face frozen now in a military disguise. He hated that man in the mirror, hated him. Oh, God, there was a useless bloody man, coming up to forty and still full of boy's dreams of ships coming in

The mirror man looked sad. Yes, he hated that man, that man he had made in the mirror, that mirror man who had unmade him. No one honored that foolish sad impostor, no one loved him. Except him: for only he knew that the big idjit had meant no harm, had suffered many's a hurt. Ah, poor fraud, he thought. You're all I have. Yet even I don't like you.

At the end of *The Luck of Ginger Coffey* Moore adds something new to the mirror message: loneliness is not all: failure is not the final judgment: the last page of the book returns to the mirror:

In the dresser mirror, the man began to cry. Detached, he watched the tears run down that sad impostor's face, gather on the edges of that large moustache. Why was that man boo-hooing? Because he no longer lusted for his wife? Because he wasn't able to leave her? Ah, you idjit, you. Don't you know that love isn't just going to bed? Love isn't an act, it's a whole life

He had tried: he had not won. But oh! what did it matter? He would die in humble circe: it did not matter. There would be no victory for Ginger Coffey, no victory big or little, for . . . he had learned the truth. Life was the victory Going on was the victory

The mirror as teller of truths is, of course, one of Joyce's epiphanic devices in *Dubliners*, and Ginger Coffey is, in a sense, a non-literary Gabriel Conroy, a stylized ham version of the weak nervous Conroy whose glimpse of himself in the glass is the climax of Joyce's "The Dead".

As he passed in the way of the cheval-glass he caught sight of himself in full length, his broad, well-filled shirt-front, the face whose expression always puzzled him when he saw it in a mirror, and his glimmering gilt-rim eyeglassesA shameful consciousness of his own person assailed him. He saw himself as a ludicrous figure, acting as a pennyboy for his aunts, a nervous, well-meaning sentimentalist, orating to vulgarians and idealising his own clownish lusts, the pitiable fatuous fellow he had caught a glimpse of in the mirror.

I HAVE DWELT so long on the mirror of Moore and Joyce because I think Moore is probably, at this time, Joyce's heir in fiction. Not his sole heir—for Joyce has many children: and not being sole heir, Moore has inherited—so far—only a small part of Joyce's legacy. Moore has Joyce's compassion, that essential openness and anticipation which never disqualifies any man from the possibility of fictional—i.e. *human*, significance. Moore's heroes are all unheroic, lead lives *below* history—as indeed, Leopold Bloom does. No civilization depends on Judith Hearne or Diarmud Devine or Ginger Coffey: their death would leave the world unchanged except that Brian Moore, like James Joyce, believes there is limitless fiction in the fall of a sparrow.

Moore's Belfast and Montreal are similar to Joyce's Dublin. Details of a city are used to build a world: Belfast is dreary, Montreal is alien, but the human condition of Moore's heroes, like that of Joyce's, is only partly dependent upon cities and surroundings. Life is tough. Men are judged daily, weighed and found wanting. But the judgment must not paralyze. The significant difference between Moore's Ginger Coffey and his Judith Hearne and Diarmud Devine is that Ginger knows defeat must not defeat him, that the miracle which is life flares forth from the unworthy as from the worthy. Moore has taken Ginger Coffey not merely beyond *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* and *The Feast of Lupercal*

but he has, in a way, passed beyond the limits of Joyce's *Dubliners* and has entered the greater world of Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses*.

Ginger Coffey is out of Leopold Bloom and *Ulysses*; Moore has pared away the literary devices and touched the core of that novel, the lonely passion of the uninvited-to-the-feast unlucky man, Leopold Bloom turned into a celebration of the human spirit doing what it does in moments of magnificence—liberate itself from the *facts* of life. To write the saga of Ginger Coffey Moore obviously had to see Bloom's facts—suicide father, dead infant son, alien daughter, cuckolding wife, hostile city, despising, hating him for his Jewishness, his advertising job, his sobriety, his doctrine of love: and he had to see, too, that Leopold Bloom is *not* the sum of these facts nor their categories. Bloom's *being* is a success, *and* heroic. This, I submit, is what Moore is after in *The Luck of Ginger Coffey*. The portrait of a hero as failure: the celebration of life by those who don't define themselves by defeat and "humble circs".

As I've already indicated, though, Moore's being Joyce's heir is so far only a limited accomplishment. Anyone reading Moore's three novels knows, of course, that they are really one novel being rewritten (if the second was not an advance over the first, the third is certainly a wonderful culmination of the earlier two). Which brings me to the question of what Joyce might yet will Brian Moore—or what Moore might do all on his own. Moore has opened a tiny window on a fully-developed world. He has done what he has done so well that it must now be considered *done*. Another novel about an imposter, a nervous man, a fearful lady would be, in my opinion, unworthy of his talents. The window must be shut: other windows must be opened.

So far in Moore's fiction there is almost no sense of a larger world of space and time, of history, of ideas, of complex feelings, situations. His fiction expands the "moments seized" theme of Browning's poetry: in the first two books the characters don't make it, in the third it's a tie. His heroes see their faces in the mirror but the effect tends to turn the world over to Narcissus. What's showing *around* the hero's face? What's on the other side of the mirror? In short, to return to Joyce, Moore has not yet found the Joyce way of using the sensibility of a simple, uncomplicated, concrete, specific man like Bloom to reach unsimple cosmic questions like the ones that recur in Bloom's interior monologues during the course of his *Ulysses* wandering. I won't, of course, be put off by that old bit about "such was not his intention". *Ginger Coffey* is a sufficient departure *stylistically* to indicate the possibility of new intentions.

Religion and its symbols are almost the sole contact with a greater world in

Moore's novels. The questions of life and death are subjected to the prevailing religious answers by three heroes uncertain of God, their church, their faith. This uncertainty is very significant, I think because as one passes from the first books to the third one finds that the difference between Ginger Coffey and the earlier characters is that Ginger is *married*, that he has a *daughter*, that he has made some commitment to life *literally*, and that he has near him the *human* answer to man's age-old questions. Moore's "religion" is what Arnold gets close to as possibility in "Dover Beach": "Come, love, let us be true to one another," because, if we are *not*, then the rest is despair and ruin and darkness. If God and the Church (or church) are solace is not *the* question: human loneliness can only have a human comforter. Judith Hearne and Diarmud Devine are existentially dead without another human's warmth: Ginger Coffey has a wife—not triumphantly. His realization is the human answer:

Love [is] . . . knowing you and she will care about each other when sex and daydreams, fights and futures—when all that's on the shelf and done with . . .

Moore has a great comic sense in his books: each of the novels has a great scene in it, usually a sad attempt at making love or a wild confrontation scene such as the one between Ginger and his wife's lover. Moore never loses sight of the absurdity of his Devine or Coffey, and in the midst of a scrap is always reminding you of how ludicrous a figure his hero cuts. Like Joyce, Moore uses humor to point up the serious. Ginger Coffey's silly appearance, like Bloom's poached egg eyes, doesn't cancel out the tension in his quest.

THE COMIC, rather than the satiric eye is the eye of compassion, and Moore's greatest accomplishment so far is his delicate combining of love and the absurd, compassion and the ludicrous. Even a clown, a fool, a fop may have significant destinies. This is what makes Brian Moore truly the heir of James Joyce. He has picked up where Joyce left off—with the commonplace, the unheralded: Maria in *Dubliners*' "Clay", Little Chandler in "A Little Cloud", Mr. Duffy in "A Painful Case". Disregarding the literary innovation of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, its concern for the artist, for literature, Moore has renewed our awareness of the complexity of the clerical character as well as any other contemporary writer, including J. F. Powers. The "retreat" section of the *Portrait* means most to Moore. Finally, as I've already indicated, his *Ulysses* is a novel without Stephen Dedalus in it: his *Ulysses*—*The Luck of Ginger Coffey*—is a novel told solely from the point of view of a Leopold Bloom.

I've made much of the Joyce connection because I want to suggest that I think Brian Moore a highly significant writer. His significance is far greater than the fact that he has come to reside in Canada and set his fiction in Canadian cities. In *The Luck of Ginger Coffey*, if not earlier, Moore shows a first-rate talent for the creation of characters with *style*—in fact I wish Brian Moore had greater confidence in his gift to do this: he would dispense with tags and exclamations and repetitious devices to coerce us into *hearing* the voice of Ginger Coffey. Ginger Coffey *is*. His style is not the superficial tricks of literary art but a way of looking at the world, a way of thinking, a way of feeling. And out of Ginger's style grows the unique style of Moore's entire novel—a searching, relentless analysis of self which here, for the first time in Moore's fiction, is entirely successful. Ginger's style is everywhere and adds flair to every part of Montreal he sees and touches. This is the new dimension in *Ginger Coffey*—the affirmation of the world which comes, as it does in Bloom's *Ulysses*, from an insignificant man seeing the world significantly.

This is what Ginger Coffey, proofreader, *sees*:

Mr. MacGregor [his boss] was coming through. Bony old arms hanging naked from shirt sleeves, blue vein pumping in his pale forehead, fanatic eye starved for trouble. As he swept out on his nightly visitation, office boys, delinquent deskmen, guilty reporters, all avoided his eye, practiced the immobility of small animals as a hawk moves over a forest . . . The composing room foreman waited his nightly sortie with the amused contempt of a Roman general dealing with the chieftain of a small hill tribe. Here, each night, MacGregor relived his defeat.

Ginger's style—Moore's style—has brought colour and joy into a world which, from the point of view of the character observing it, may be essentially colourless and joyless. Ginger may be a failure, but the world can never be a flop—as the world lonely despised Bloom moves through is not; the life-force and human magnificence are as vividly dramatized in the vicious as in the saintly; Moore's Mr. MacGregor and Joyce's Citizen or Buck Mulligan, no matter what harm they may cause a Ginger or a Bloom, celebrate possibility, go beyond the categories of success and failure, high or low, good or evil.

We had no significant football in Canada before we took to imports. Perhaps Brian Moore will have a professional import's effect on the quality of our writing. *The Luck of Ginger Coffey* marks him as a man of great talent who still works within a relatively narrow world. Signs of change are in this book. And in *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* and *The Feast of Lupercal* signs of other possibilities abound. Brian Moore is a writer in Canada who has just begun to write.

As result and as omen his effect on Canada cannot be anything but good.

LIFE IN A NEW LAND

Notes on the immigrant theme in Canadian fiction

Ruth McKenzie

THE LIFE OF THE IMMIGRANT would seem an obvious theme for the Canadian novelist, particularly as the pioneer early became a popular and romantic figure in our native literature. Yet it was only comparatively recently that the immigrant made his appearance as a specific fictional type—a stranger in a strange land, uprooted from his native soil and struggling to adjust himself to a new world. Only, in fact, with the publication of Ralph Connor's *The Foreigner* in 1909 were the peculiar problems of the immigrant really introduced as a subject of fictional study. The purpose of this essay is to examine some of the aspects of this theme as it has been developed during the half-century since Connor's novel appeared.

As an attempt to penetrate the problems of the immigrant, *The Foreigner* is only partially successful. It centres around a Russian family, the Kalmars. They live in one of the "little black huts" that marked the "foreign" section of Winnipeg at the turn of the century, and here we are introduced to the typical Continental immigrants of that era. "With a sprinkling of Germans, Italians and Swiss, it was almost solidly Slav," Connor remarks of the Winnipeg colony, and it seems likely that he is speaking of these people from a direct acquaintance gained in real life in his rôle as Presbyterian minister C. W. Gordon.

Even in fiction Connor's approach is still that of the missionary. He wishes to convert the immigrant, not to accept him as he is. As in all his novels, one of the leading characters of *The Foreigner* is a preacher, Brown, who works among the Galicians (Ukrainians) in a remote Saskatchewan settlement. We may safely assume that Brown expresses Connor's viewpoint when he says, referring to his desire to help the Galician children, that he will "do anything to make them good

Christians and good Canadians, which is the same thing." And, even more significantly: "These people here exist as an undigested foreign mass. They must be taught our ways of thinking and living, or it will be a mighty bad thing for us in Western Canada."

In spite of Connor's evident good will towards the Russians and Galicians who people a great part of *The Foreigner*, it is clear that he is not really at home with them. He sees them as picturesque but somewhat uncouth characters, requiring Canadianisation, by which he means, apparently, a knowledge of the English language, education in British principles of democracy, and a moral code based on the Protestant Christian faith.

His lack of real understanding is evident in the portrayal of his leading character, Kalman Kalmar, son of an immigrant ex-Nihilist. Kalman does indeed develop into a romantic hero of the type familiar in Connor's novels, but he never comes alive as the Scottish-Canadian heroes do—Ranald Macdonald in *The Man from Glengarry*, for instance, or Shock MacGregor in *The Prospector*. And his eventual success in life derives far less from his own efforts than from the intervention of fate. As a boy he is rescued from the foreign colony in Winnipeg by the kindly Mrs. French ("a little lady with white hair and a face pale and chastened into sweetness"), who sends him to live on a prairie farm with her brother-in-law, Jack French. Fate steps in again when, as a young man, he discovers a mine in northern Saskatchewan, and yet again when he wins the love of a rich girl.

Indeed, while one must give Connor credit for introducing the theme of the immigrant to Canadian fiction, one has only to compare his Russians and Galicians with the Ukrainian settlers in the recent novel, *Sons of the Soil*, by Illia Kiriak, to see the difference in understanding between an author writing of his own people and from direct experience, and one who, like Connor, views the immigrant from outside without sufficient creative imagination to enter into his predicament. *Sons of the Soil* has no literary value whatever, but it has at least a documentary value which *The Foreigner* lacks; the Ukrainian-born Kiriak shows his settlers in a convincing relationship with their background and their traditions, and from his own knowledge he helps us to understand the efforts that were needed to settle their Alberta farms.

BUT THE IMMIGRANT THEME, first sketched by Connor in *The Foreigner*, was to be developed with surer knowledge by two writers of

European origin whose early works appeared while he was still writing the last of his popular novels. These were Frederick Philip Grove, born in Sweden, and Laura Goodman Salverson, an Icelandic Canadian. These writers combined first-hand experience of the immigrant's life, which Connor did not have, with considerable creative ability. Except that both wrote of pioneers in Manitoba, they had little else in common.

Grove, who reached Canada in 1892, was fascinated by both the idea and the experience of pioneering, and he saw his work as having a peculiar relation to this social phenomenon. "I, the cosmopolitan," he says in his autobiography, *In Search of Myself*, "had fitted myself to be the spokesman of a race—not necessarily a race in the ethnographic sense; in fact not at all in that sense; rather in the sense of a stratum of society which cross-sectioned all races, consisting of those who, in no matter what climate, at no matter what time, feel the impulse of starting anew, from the ground up, to fashion a new world which might serve as the breeding-place of a civilization to come . . . Order must arise out of chaos; the wilderness must be tamed."

Most of Grove's novels are in fact concerned in one way or another with taming the wilderness, and two of them—not counting the autobiographical *A Search for America*—are concerned with immigrants. Both of these novels—*Settlers of the Marsh* (1925) and *The Yoke of Life* (1930)—are set in the wilderness to the west of Lake Manitoba where Grove taught school and which he describes so vividly in *Over Prairie Trails* (1922); their characters are settlers of many nationalities—German, Russian, Swedish, Icelandic and Canadian—and the pioneer environment is the setting for the drama of love, ambition and frustration which emerges.

Grove's approach to literature was very different from Connor's. Grove "abhorred" romanticism which, in his view, "means essentially a view of life in which circumstance is conquered by endeavour only if endeavour is aided by the *deus ex machina*."¹ And, unlike Connor's heroes, Grove's are often thwarted in ambition and defeated in life by combinations of circumstances which they have neither the strength nor the wisdom to overcome.

This process is evident in the fate of Niels Lindstedt, the central figure of *Settlers in the Marsh*, who brings about his own tragedy by his very simplicity and his awkwardness in human relationships. Niels is a Swedish immigrant who takes up land in Canada to escape from the poverty and humiliation his mother

¹ *In Search of Myself*, Toronto, 1946.

had endured. "In this country," he feels, "there was a way out for him who was young and strong." He cherished a "longing for the land that would be his; with a house of his own and a wife that would go through it like an inspiration."

Materially, Niels succeeds. The farm he clears is one of the best in the district, and the house he builds is the largest. But this man, so strong physically, so shrewd in planning his farm operations, is naïvely inept in his relations with other people. When Ellen, reserved, repressed and unable to forget her mother's sufferings, tells him that she cannot marry him, he is overcome with despair, and falls easily into the hands of the gay widow, Mrs. Vogel. But he is incapable of making the adjustments that might render his marriage with her reasonably happy, and so he becomes more isolated and withdrawn. When the blinkers are suddenly removed from his eyes, and he sees his wife as the prostitute she is, he becomes violent and shoots her.

Yet *Settlers in the Marsh* does not end pessimistically. Niels escapes hanging, serves his time, and returns to his farm, where he and Ellen, ten years older, resume the pursuit of the dream which previously he had followed alone.

A more complete and final tragedy destroys Len Sterner, the hero of *The Yoke of Life*. Len's ambition is frustrated in boyhood by the lack of a school, and later by the demands made on him by his hard-working and poverty-stricken stepfather. And his desire for love is thwarted because he fixes his affections on a girl who wants more of the material pleasures and comforts than he can give her. The girl, Lydia, is also a product of pioneer farm life; shallow and vain by nature, she longs to escape from the hard and barren existence she sees all around her, and she uses her feminine attractions to this end.

Len is in fact a kind of frontier Jude Fawley, and the author says of him, as Hardy might have said of Jude, "All things had come to him ill-adjusted in point of time." When Lydia eventually turns towards him, he cannot forgive the destruction of his idealised boyhood image of her, and when he takes her on the long and fateful trip up the lake the atmosphere is heavy with impending doom. The possibility of happiness has come too late for Len, and he makes his fatal decision. "A thought had flashed through his brain, and lamed him like a hemorrhage. No. Life was not for him. That thought decided all things. His road lay clear ahead and led into death."

Len exemplifies the poetic temperament that is crushed by the exigencies and the practical necessities of pioneer life. He has no worldly ambition and he can work hard only as long as he has a dream possible of fulfilment. But when the dream is extinguished, life loses its meaning. His inadequacy is emphasized by

the contrasting temperament of his young brother Charlie, a man happily attuned to his environment. "Charlie was clean-limbed and strong: the beginning and starting-point of a race of farmers." Appropriately, in terms of Grove's attitude, it is Charlie who is fortunate in his choice of a wife and who takes over the home farm when his stepfather is forced through debt to abandon it.

In both these novels Grove presents, as a background to the individual dramas of frustration and maladjustment, a picture of pioneer life painted in naturalistic detail. The back-breaking labour of clearing stumps and rocks from the land, the calamities brought by flood and hail, the harsh life of the women—all these are vividly described. And over the whole scene Grove creates an atmosphere of elemental struggle which intensifies the grimness of the human drama and which, in *Settlers of the Marsh* particularly, recalls Knut Hamsun's Norwegian classic, *Growth of the Soil*.

In order to judge the extent of Grove's creative imaginativeness in *Settlers in the Marsh* and *The Yoke of Life*, it is helpful to compare them with *A Search for America*, the autobiographical novel which ironically remains his most romantic work. Grove started writing *A Search for America* in 1893, a year after he reached Canada; he did not succeed in getting it published until 1927. To all intents and purpose, it is the story of his own experiences as an immigrant condensed and re-arranged so that what happened to Grove in about twenty years occupies in the novel a year in the life of the hero, Philip Branden.

Branden is the son of a wealthy Swede. He has been brought up to a life of luxury and travel, but this ends abruptly when his father loses his fortune. He then sails to Montreal, hoping, like so many immigrants of his day, to make a modest fortune. To his consternation, he finds that he is completely unadapted to earn his living. "I had stepped," he says, "from what I could not help regarding as a well-ordered, comfortable environment into what had upon me the effect of utter chaos. For the moment all human contact was non-existent. I felt that not only had I to learn a great many things, the social connections of a world entirely different from the world I knew, for instance; but I also had laboriously to tear down or at least to submerge what I had built up before—my tastes, inclinations, interests." Branden is in turn a waiter in Toronto, a book agent in New York, a hobo, a factory worker and an itinerant harvester; he returns to Canada where, like Grove, he remains and becomes a teacher.

A Search for America is interesting for the light it throws on Grove himself, but its value does not go far beyond the documentary. It is not a novel in the strict sense of the term, since its actions and its characters have not been conceived

imaginatively; it is always, at best, fictionalised autobiography. *Settlers of the Marsh* and *The Yoke of Life*, on the other hand, present their own convincing imaginary worlds, and for this reason they are better works of literary art; they also—and perhaps for the same reason—contribute much more to our understanding of the immigrant, his problems, and his psychology.

AS WE HAVE SEEN, nationality in the ordinary sense counted for little in Grove's mind; he was concerned with men whose distinctions of race and nation had been submerged in the common struggle to tame the wilderness. Laura Goodman Salverson, on the other hand, deliberately set out in her first novel, *The Viking Heart* (1923) to offer an interpretation of her own people, the Icelanders. "I wanted," she remembered sixteen years later, "to write a story which would define the price any foreign group must pay for its place in the national life of the country of its adoption."²

The Icelandic immigrants of *The Viking Heart* live in a remote community of Manitoba, and, like Grove's pioneers, they must endure privation and hard toil. But they have one advantage; where men like Niels Lindstedt and Len Sterner fight their battles in isolation, the Icelanders gain support and strength from the feeling of kinship which binds the community together and which arises from a common background and common traditions. In the new land the children are nurtured, like their parents, on the old sagas, and the older generation never lose their faith in education. "There is but one hope, one liberation for the poor. It is education," says the preacher Sjera Bjarni.

As the children grow up, a rift appears between the generations in *The Viking Heart*, and Mrs. Salverson is more successful in depicting the first generation than the second. Her portrayal of the parents, the real immigrants, is based at least partly on actual people and episodes in the Manitoba Icelandic settlements, and it attains an authenticity of feeling which is not always present when she comes to describe the sons and daughters and their withdrawal from the traditional pattern of life.

Unlike the heroes of Grove's novels, the young people of *The Viking Heart* achieve astonishing material success. A violinist of international fame, a well-known surgeon, a successful dress designer—these are produced by a single pioneer community. But the success has its tragic side, and here Mrs. Salverson

² *Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter*, Toronto, 1939.

reveals a sharp insight into the effects of immigration even on a closely knit community. The parents find a tendency in the children to turn against them and all they stand for; this, along with their severe hardships, is the price they pay for seeking a new home in a strange land. The children, on their side, cannot any longer accept the old values without question, but they are tempted to grasp at the most superficial and least worthy aspects of the new environment in order to gain a sense of belonging.

However, not all the children react extremely; most of them, indeed, are level-headed enough to be able to adjust to the new country without discarding everything their parents have taught them. As Thor, one of the second generation, says to his mother, "I am not likely to forget the heritage of my fathers, but I can best prove my Norse blood by honouring this country which is mine." And so the Canadian-born sons and daughters of the immigrants are unmistakably Canadian, and even the parents become so, imperceptibly. After Thor dies, it dawns on his mother that she, too, is Canadian. "This Canada, which has demanded much of them—it was her country."

Yet, despite the capability with which Mrs. Salverson has observed the phenomena of immigrant integration, the most convincing aspect of *The Viking Heart* remains its success in portraying the original immigrant community, in evoking the integrity, the courage and the power to endure of the people who came from Iceland to the prairies. Chiefly because of this, it remains the best of Mrs. Salverson's several novels.

At least one other of these, *The Dark Weaver* (1937), also develops the immigrant theme. It differs from *The Viking Heart* in that its characters are town-dwellers of mixed Scandinavian origins, but it resembles the earlier book in revealing the clash of the generations, and the propensity of the sons and daughters to go their own way to the chagrin of their European-born parents. But this intent is almost submerged in the profusion of plot and in the author's efforts to develop the rather artificial secondary theme suggested by the title—that each of us is a shuttle in the hands of Fate (the Weaver) which forms a pattern out of our lives that for us has little meaning.

UNDOUBTEDLY the best novels written about a particular group of immigrants are those by such Jewish writers as Mordecai Richler and Adele Wiseman. But here a distinction should be made. These writers do not set

out deliberately to expound an idea about the effects of immigration on a particular group as Mrs. Salverson did in *The Viking Heart*, nor do they see themselves, like Grove, as the spokesmen of some race of pioneers. Furthermore, they write about Jews, not with the deliberate intention of interpreting Jews to others, but because these are the people of their *milieu*, because the conflict between foreign-born and Canadian Jews, between orthodox and non-orthodox, and between the generations, has been part of the fabric of their lives.

Conflict forms the essence of two of the best of these Canadian Jewish novels, *Son of a Smaller Hero* (1955) by Mordecai Richler, and *The Sacrifice* (1956) by Adele Wiseman, the former set in Montreal and the latter in an unnamed city presumed to be Winnipeg. The Jewish immigrants and their children who figure in these novels experience some of the same problems of adjustment as the characters in Grove's and Salverson's novels, but their situation is further complicated by the underlying fear of anti-semitism and, even more, by the distinctive character of their religious beliefs and practices.

In *The Sacrifice* even the names of the characters have a religious significance. The dominating figure is Abraham, a butcher who believes implicitly in the orthodox tenets of his forefathers and who looks to his son Isaac and later to his grandson Moses to fulfil his frustrated ambitions of scholarship and to carry on the Jewish faith. These hopes are intensified by the fact that Abraham and his wife Sarah are never able to adjust completely to the new world in which they live. They are always looking back, their memories held by the episode which impelled them to flee from their homeland—the hanging of their two sons in a Ukrainian pogrom. Isaac too looks back, remembering his gay and intelligent brothers and knowing that somehow he must make up to his parents for their loss.

But although Isaac can never forget the past in Europe, his eyes turn more and more towards the future in Canada, and so he is caught in the conflict between the past and the future, the old and the new. He marries a Canadian girl; he finds that he cannot accept his father's orthodoxy without question; he yields to the necessity of working on the Sabbath. And when in the end he rushes into the synagogue to save the Torah from fire he does so impulsively, and not out of a deep religious urge, as his father prefers to believe.

When Abraham loses Sarah and then Isaac, his last bonds with the old world are gone. His hopes for the future become concentrated on Moses, Isaac's child. But here he comes into conflict with Isaac's Canadian wife Ruth, a product of the new world. And the quarrel between Abraham and Ruth leads to the final disaster in which the unbalanced old man commits a murder, with the implica-

tion that he believes he is atoning by blood sacrifice for the death of his sons.

It is the young Moses, of the second, Canadian generation, who is left to carry the burden of memories and guilt. Only after he has become reconciled with his grandfather and has found it possible to forgive him and accept the past, can he face the future with confidence. "It was as though he stood suddenly within the threshold of a different kind of understanding, no longer crouching behind locked doors, but standing upright, with his grandfather leading him, as he always had."

The Sacrifice is an ample novel, warm and rich in feeling. By contrast, Mordecai Richler's *Son of a Smaller Hero* is terse and satirical, yet the conflicts which the two novels portray are basically similar. Richler's hero, Noah Adler, is the grandson of a family which has gone much farther towards adaptation to the new land than Abraham in *The Sacrifice*. Melech Adler, the head of the family, has worked his way up from a scrap-collector to a coal merchant; some of his sons have become prosperous and have moved out of the ghetto; they and their kind deplore the influx of the "greeners", the post-war immigrants. "They speak with accents two miles long . . . Wives who still wear wigs! After all we did here to improve conditions they'd like to put us back into the middle ages." But Melech Adler has the patriarchal desire to dominate; his grown-up sons do not please him, and he turns to his grandson Noah, whom he hopes will "be a somebody. Something. Something not like them. All there is for them is money." Noah, however, wants to lead his own life. He wants to think things through for himself. He resents the domination of his family and he does not believe in their orthodox religious practices. So he asserts his independence by leaving home.

Yet Noah finds that he cannot make a complete break with the past. His love affair with a Gentile girl peters out, and he is drawn back into the family circle after the death of his father. But only temporarily, only to escape again, this time by going to Europe. The ending is inconclusive, tentative, yet, in fictional terms, the problems that lead up to it are made real and convincing enough, and so one feels that departure is forced upon Noah Adler as the consequence of conflicts that are both pressing and—for the present, insoluble.

The foregoing notes on the immigrant theme in Canadian fiction are not exhaustive, but I have endeavoured to deal with what seem to me the best novels and the most interesting authors in this genre. They are novels which, insofar as they truly portray the immigrants' condition, are marked by a peculiar intensity of conflict, conflict between man and an unfamiliar and harsh environment, conflict between generations at different stages of adaptation to that environment.

One of the most striking conclusions that emerges from this study is that the

problems of the immigrant have rarely been successfully observed and interpreted from outside; quite apart from its literary merits or demerits, Connor's *The Foreigner* fails because the author cannot enter fully into the real problems of his characters. The authors who have produced more or less successful novels on this interesting theme have either themselves been immigrants, like Grove, or they have grown up in communities where they know immigrants intimately, like Laura Salverson, Adele Wiseman and Mordecai Richler.

The major native-born Canadian novelists have, indeed, ignored the immigrant to a striking degree. It is true that Mazo de la Roche occasionally brings in an American, English or Irish immigrant to marry one of her characters, and in *The Building of Jalna* (1944) she describes the original Whiteoaks settlers, but her attitude towards them is almost entirely romantic and has little to do with the problems of real immigrants. Similarly, while Hugh MacLennan writes with great sympathy of the Highland settlers on Cape Breton in the Prologue to *Each Man's Son*, this serves only as a background to the novel proper, with its Canadian-born characters. And, while immigrants have appeared in some of Morley Callaghan's stories, such as *Last Spring They Came Over*, he has never been concerned with the special problems of immigrants as a social group.

Thus there appears to be a direct connection between the time an author or his forebears have been in Canada and his interest in the immigrant theme. By the third generation it appears to recede and become inactive. But this does not mean that the theme is likely to disappear quickly from Canadian fiction. Indeed, when we consider that some two million people have entered Canada from abroad since the last war, it seems likely that some outstanding Canadian novels on this theme may even now be in the making.³

³ Since these words were written an important new immigrant novel, Brian Moore's *The Luck of Ginger Coffey*, has indeed appeared. —ED.

THE UNWITTING ELEGIAC

Newfoundland folk-song

Paul West

The substance of this article will appear in somewhat different form as a chapter in Paul West's book on Newfoundland, to be published later in the year by the Macmillan Company of Canada whose permission to publish beforehand we wish to acknowledge.

THE VISITOR who is anxious not so much to see what is burgeoning in Newfoundland as to find what has fed it spiritually will not look in vain for signs of a special heritage. In the folk-songs, for instance, he will find a mixture of worlds: that of traditional English and Irish balladry, that of the sung lyric—ageless in certain of its tropes, and that of extempore local satire, yarn-spinning and drinking-song.

During more than three hundred years as a Cinderella colony, Newfoundland grew rich in song. In one sense such wealth is ineffable; in another 'ineffable' is, of course, quite the wrong word. Songs were brought across from England, Ireland and Scotland. Others found their way into Newfoundland from the mainland, thus adding some things exclusively Canadian and others which were variants on songs originally British. But many songs were created in Newfoundland itself, and it is no exaggeration to describe these as the pithiest, the most ingenious, and the most evocative of the island temper.

The best are by Johnny Burke, a man gifted in the yoking together by violence of heterogeneous images. No one is quite as bizarrely ingenious as Burke; but other names usually noted are H. Le Mesurier (not prolific) and A. R. Scammell (author of *The Squid Jiggin' Ground*). It was customary for outport fishermen to record local events, especially misfortune at sea, in songs known as "Come All Ye's"; the first line usually ran, "Now come all ye jolly fishermen". But the

songs were not always jolly. Disaster, animosity and unlyrical candour keep showing a face alongside lullabies, satires and euphoric rants. In isolated fishing communities a new song was an event, whether composed locally or imported orally. Many songs were written down, and crudely printed songbooks exist. In 1929 the Vassar College Folklore Expedition collected almost two hundred which were later published as *Ballads and Sea Songs of Newfoundland* and about the same time Maude Karpeles gathered a similar number in *Folk Songs for Newfoundland*.

These songs are still sung and enjoyed; they do not always mean what visitors think they mean, and much in some of the most arresting songs is esoteric. But this is a way of binding together—in a community of consent and rhythm—that takes us back to the first ballads. The Newfoundland song has a defensive or reckless quality missing from most English songs; when matiness is suggested it is often of a provocative, provoked, baited, delirious kind. The native Newfoundland songs are rather lacking in repose; even the lyrics get restless at times. And a sheer love of naming objects produces songs that seem riotous, knobbly catalogues offered to someone who does not believe in the external world. In fact, for most of Newfoundland's severe history, that world was not much worth believing in; so the songs have a resolute look at some of the better objects. The rest is imported keening, languishing and suspense.

Songs are still written in Newfoundland; each year many specimens are submitted for the Ballad section of the Provincial Arts and Letters Competition. But what will happen as the province becomes affluent? Perhaps the folk song will fade out until the external world drives people back to primal images. When men no longer need to sing while hauling a boat up the beach, straining at the capstan or floating a house across a bay, they will be utterly civilised—at peace to listen to the ticking of their synchronised gadgets. That day has not yet come in Newfoundland; the songs still have a *use* in addition to their charm. And, one is glad to say, while the people of the outports sing spontaneously (and with their own local variations), St. John's has a Glee Club with many fine recordings to its credit and will shortly see published a local collection of the songs of Johnny Burke.

TO HEAR AND READ Newfoundland folk-songs is to move, for part of the time, through a simplified and unreal landscape; obviously the words

are the merest pretexts, although none the less rich in associations and nostalgia for that. What is fascinating is to see the local ethos being grafted into the time-honoured catch, and the gradual incorporation of local names. And above all one gets the feel of a community where singing is important—as a principle of identification and membership as well as a celebration of the human and local lot. The folk-song is social, intended to elicit ready participants. Its art is assimilative; your own life is implicit in the song and might even be incorporated in stanzas of your own devising. Let us take, as an example, *The Badger Drive*, whose words were written by the Newfoundland folk-singer, John V. Devine.¹ This is a song about the fishermen who work in the lumber camps during the winter: a familiar pattern of local life. But the familiar is hammered home by the use of proper names; so that this song becomes not so much a chant as an anthem in which individuals, with all the backing of group unison, take utter possession of a part of the world. The song is all compact, all complicity, all apartness merged in community. At times there is just the merest touch of sycophancy—"Bill Dorothey, he is the manager / And he's a good man at the trade." But at other times there is also hero-worship:

And Ronald Kelly is in Command,
For Ronald is boss on the river
And he is one man that's alive;
He drove the wood off Victoria;
Now he's out on the main river drive.

The whole conception of the song is realistic: the life of the men who drive the logs downriver to the mills in the spring is presented in considerable detail:

There is one class of men in this country
That never is mentioned in song,
And now, since their trade is advancing,
They'll come out on top before long.
They say that our sailors have danger
And likewise our warriors bold,
But there's none know the life of a driver,
When he suffers in hardships and cold.
With their pike-poles and pea-vies and bateaus and all,
And they're sure to drive out in the spring, that's the time,
With the caulks in their boots as they get on the logs,
And it's hard to get over their time.

¹ Badger is west of Grand Falls, on the Exploits River.

Such a song is written to give men the means of celebrating their own daily lives; it adds a modicum of dignity, of self-expression, of communal pride. To understand its particular character, one can compare it with the hackneyed tropes of another Newfoundland song, which is fairly representative of its type:

One evening late as I rambled by
The banks of a fair pearly stream,
I sat on a bed of primroses
And soon I fell into a dream.

I dreamt that I saw a young virgin
Whose equals I ne'er saw before,
And she sighed for the songs of her country
As she wandered from Erin Green Shore.

Before long we reach eyes like diamonds, gold tresses, ivory teeth, green mantle, and shamrock: all very artificial although once it might have been fresh. This is the conventional lyric, devised more as an excuse to sing than to convey anything social in the song. It is like a thousand other folk-songs; it lacks the particularity of *The Badger Drive*, that song's lively sense of a distinct ethos. And the Newfoundland folk-song, I suggest, excels when it gets nearer to folk-lore and local history than to transatlantic models of shopworn vagueness. The folk-song is a kind of local signature, evocative and atavistic, an earnest of presence and vitality; it is also, to my mind, one of the most authentic introductions to an island people of considerable inventiveness.

The variety of these Newfoundland songs is immense: tragic, usually death at sea bringing in its wake penury and broken hearts; tragic-jocular, the hearty version of horror, so that true horror can for once be taken lightly; tales of misled maidens and duped sailors—the romantic ironic; the rollicking catalogue and the heroic affirmation. There are all kinds, and innumerable permutations. Here, however, my special concern is with songs distinctively regional.

Let me start, then, with the polemical *Anti-Confederation Song*, first in vogue during the election of 1869 when Newfoundland voted against joining the newly-founded Dominion. The sentiments were still valid in 1949, when Confederation became a fact; and they were still being chanted by students and muttered by taxidivers in 1959, the year in which Premier Smallwood, as a gesture to Ottawa, had all public buildings draped in black.

Hurrah for our own native isle, Newfoundland!
Not a stranger shall hold one inch of its strand!
Her face turns to Britain, her back to the Gulf.
Come near at your peril, Canadian Wolf!

Ye brave Newfoundlanders who plough the salt sea
With hearts like the eagle so bold and so free,
The time is at hand when you'll all have to say
If Confederation will carry the day.

In 1869 they said no. Notice the attribution there of the clichés to the oppressors!
The coercive flattery rebukes itself; but the next stanza puts things in down-to-earth language, just to make Canadian penny-pinching and hypocrisy clear:

Cheap tea and molasses they say they will give,
All taxes take off that the poor man may live;
Cheap nails and cheap lumber our coffins to make,
And homespun to mend our old clothes when they break.

The touch about the coffins gives a suitably morbid frame for the next complaint:

If they take off the taxes how then will they meet
The heavy expense of the country's up-keep?
Just give them the chance to get us in the scrape
And they'll chain us as slaves with pen, ink and red tape.

Would you barter the right that your fathers have won,
Your freedom transmitted from father to son?
For a few thousand dollars of Canadian gold
Don't let it be said that your birthright was sold.

The song is to be sung "fervently". No wonder! Similar sentiments can be found in Cyprus, Man and Sardinia; island people are strong in the sense of domain. On the one hand, there is a pride always three parts of the way towards taking offence; on the other, there is an understandably extreme form of the human urge to cherish a clearly-bounded area. And, of course, there is too a bit of the old Adam of arrogance; not pride but disdain.

The reflex is harmless. It is an essential item in the epic story that takes us from the days when Cassie Higgins tore her flannel petticoat to make mittens for a sailor to stories of the recent present: I was told how two brothers found

themselves together on a sinking icefloe; one of them jumped calmly into the deep water, taking his knife with him. Such stories abounded in codfishing centres like Indian Harbour around 1900; some of them were true, and some of them were tall. In *Jack Was Every Inch a Sailor*, a Newfoundland version of the Jonah story, the hero is born with the black portents usual in the songs based on these tales:

Now, 'twas twenty-five or thirty years since Jack first saw the light;
He came into this world of woe one dark and stormy night.
He was born on board his father's ship as she was lying to
'Bout twenty-five or thirty miles south-east of Bacalhao.²

There is surely something ominous in the identical numbers for years and miles; a sailor's coincidence reinforcing the odd circumstances of birth. Jack was cut out for what might be called a great reverse:

When Jack grew up to be a man he went to Labrador;
He fished in Indian Harbour where his father fished before;
On his returning in the fog, he met a heavy gale,
And Jack was swept into the sea and swallowed by a whale.

But note the song's title; Jack sets every inch to work:

The whale went straight for Baffin's Bay 'bout ninety knots an hour,
And ev'ry time he blowed a spray, he'd send it in a shower.
"Oh, now," says Jack unto himself, "I must see what he's about."
He caught the whale all by the tail and turned him inside out.

And that is that; take it or leave it.

THE MYSTIQUE of the Newfoundland song comes from hardship and hard pleasure. There is a rioting vigour, an archetypal joy in oneself and one's abilities in the stamping rhythms of *I'se the B'y That Builds the Boat*:

I'se the b'y that builds the boat,
And I'se the b'y that sails her!
I'se the b'y that catches the fish
And takes 'em home to Lizer.

Sods and rinds to cover yer flake,
Cake and tea for supper,
Codfish in the spring of the year
Fried in maggoty butter.

² Bacalhao (pronounced Backaloo) is an island off the east coast of Newfoundland.

This percussive hymn of praise, at once vaunting and ironical, concrete and suggestive, reveals the spring of vitality. There is pride in simple achievement as well as a stated formula for the simple, hard life. It takes nothing much to construct a flake on which to dry your fish—except energy and heavy materials. Notice the diet on which work is to be done. Notice too the tone: nothing whining, but a plangent gusto. When sung, the verse's fourth line assumes the form of a triumphant clincher as well as the dénouement line. Essentially this is the pattern of a dance, each line pushing audacity a little further until the fourth line thumps down into common-sense again. The refrain is almost a magic formula:

*Hip yer partner, Sally Tibbo'! Hip yer partner, Sally Brown!
Fogo, Twinninggate, Morton's Harbour, All around the circle!*

The robust invocations are to things utterly familiar, but to things here capable of being catalytic, merely on being mentioned, in an orgiastic frivolity. The song goes on into an intriguing mixture of complacency and the preposterous:

I don't want your maggoty fish,
That's no good for winter;
I could buy as good as that
Down in Bonavista.

I took Liza to a dance,
And faith, but she could travel!
And every step that she did take
Was up to her knees in gravel.

The conclusion of the song is one of provocative irrelevance:

Susan White, she's out of sight,
Her petticoat wants a border;
Old Sam Oliver, in the dark,
He kissed her in the corner.

Perhaps inevitably, many of the Newfoundland songs record economic plight. *A Great Big Sea Hove in Long Beach*, for example, treats of the Depression; the fishermen, getting poor prices for their catch, had to pay highly for imported flour. The hardship is decorated with folk humour of a traditional, filling-in-the-space kind:

"Me boot is broke, me frock is tore",
Right fol-or-al taddle diddle I-do.
 "Me boot is broke, me frock is tore,
 But Georgie Snooks I do adore",
To me right fol-diddy fol-dee.
 "Oh, fish is low and flour is high",
Right fol-or-al taddle diddle I-do.
 "Oh, fish is low and flour is high,
 So Georgie Snooks he can't have I",
To me right fol-diddy fol-dee.

This is one way of making the facts, as well as expensive flour, palatable. Things are not usually so muffled; the Newfoundland folk-muse is more often pithy, robust and concrete.

These are the qualities of a jovial end-of-the-season blues called *Squarin' Up Time*; the fishermen have been paid for their summer catch, and they now have to pay off accumulated bills. The song puts us thoroughly in the picture:

Oh, the fish are all caught and the squids are all jigged,
 And the traps are caught up and the schooners unriggered;
 All hands round the cutters are driving the smoke,
 While Jacob is splicin' some left-handed rope.

'Tis the squarin' up time inside the big shop;
 The clerks are kept busy and right on the hop.
 "Look sharp, now then, sonny, and 'tend to my needs:
 A pack of those raisins without any seeds".

All arrive: Skipper John Wilkins, inquiring about his credit, gets a shock; all he wanted was "a few slips of twine"; Uncle Dick Nicholls takes his balance in Indian Root Pills, borrows Tommy Hayes's pipe and sets his whiskers on fire. Business and pranks are going full swing when the Parson walks in. Changes of heart, against the grain, suddenly take place:

"There's five dollars comin' to you, Mr. Knee."
 "I don't want it, sir; that's no good to me.
 Share it up 'tween the parson and Dr. Carew
 For I wants to keep on the good side of them two.

If I've got to niggle on six cents a day,
 I'll be wantin' the doctor by the end of next May,

And maybe the parson will have to come round
To help me square up 'fore I go underground."

These stanzas remind me of the poetry of Crabbe: precise, dry, folksy, expert at making the simple astonishing. Life is made to show its true nature; it is very much an affair of commodities, prices, scarcities, debts and reckonings. Something of the merchandising attitude rubs off into the personal relationships.

Basically these songs are much concerned with *amour-propre*; pride, dignity and face count for a great deal. But, as often as not, for every gallant triumph over the elements there is an ignominy at the hands of a woman—as if Nature were resolved to be recalcitrant in one way or another, and to prevail. So it is that in an epic context men of stature are felled by a winning female eye, directed upon them or someone else. And the whole business fascinates them. They have to get it out, have to marvel at it, in song—and in the unison of company. Perhaps these songs, among other functions, offer the singers a chance of coming to terms publicly with life's minor defeats. But not every song presents an account as frankly autobiographical as that of Harry Russell in *The Gallant Brigantine*:

My name is Harry Russell,
And I am a married man.
Three weeks before I left the shore
My trouble first began;
It started when a girl I wed
Brought forth to me a son.

That is the end of the song; the rest is unspeakable grief, and we have to imagine.

Misadventure recurs in the songs—suggestive, perhaps, of a dominantly tragic view of life; heaven knows, in the old days, life on potatoes, hard tack and fish stew was hard enough. Sometimes it is all in the tone of stilted melodrama, curiously mingling sentimentality with irony:

I said: "My good woman, were you ever married,
Or have you a father for these children small?
Have you a house, a place, or a dwelling?
Were you ever wealthy? What caused your downfall?"

That comes from *The Poor Distressed Woman*. A rather subtler presentation appears in the pathetically titled *All Gone Now*:

Said he: "By gosh
One day I owned a watch,
A diamond ring and a necktie pin;
And it's all gone now.

It's all gone now, and I got so I have a wonderful cold
For drinking odd glasses. It's all gone now."

The mock-naïve wonderfully illuminates the dying fall of the last few words.

An altogether different and extremely extravagant mood is that of *The Kelligrews Soiree*, a garrulous and high-spirited account of escapades at an island get-together. The form and the model of the song come from Ireland; the content and the spirit are pure Newfoundland.

You may talk of Clara Nolan's Ball or anything you choose,
But it couldn't hold a snuff-box to the spree at Kelligrews.
If you want your eyeballs straightened, just come out next week
with me,
And you'll have to wear your glasses at the Kelligrews Soiree.

There was birch rine, tar twine, cherry wine and turpentine,
Jowls and cavalances, ginger beer and tea,
Pigs' feet, cats' meat, dumplings boiled in a sheet,
Dandelion and crackies' teeth at the Kelligrews Soiree.

Oh, I borrowed Cluney's beaver as I squared my yards to sail,
And a swallow-tail from Hogan that was foxy on the tail;
Billy Cuddahie's old working pants and Patsy Nolan's shoes,
And an old white vest from Fogarty to sport at Kelligrews.

There was Dan Milley, Joe Lilly, Tantan and Mrs. Tilley
Dancing like a little filly, 'twould raise your heart to see.
Jim Brine, Din Ryan, Flipper Smith and Caroline;
I'll tell you, boys, we had a time at the Kelligrews Soiree.

The song's method, invigorated and given a repetitive spin by the internal rhymes, is to let the end-rhymes have their head as far as is possible within the dictates of the simple intention to say what is going on. This mixture of irrelevance and almost over-explicit cataloguing works admirably. The people are crowded in by the eatables. The mock-sophistication in the choice of 'soiree' supplies an essential touch of irony, and thus gives edge to what might have seemed a merely lumpish catalogue. The tone is impetuous and importunate, and

carries with it—well beyond the scrutines of commonsense—the contradictions. This is a rich song, crammed with matter; it makes exuberantly free with the language, and the strain one notices as the singer (or speaker) pushes towards the end-rhyme gives the whole thing an added, rather costive tension.

Similarly percussive in rhythm but by no means as concrete in variety is *We'll Rant and We'll Roar*, a well-known near-anthem. But the whole song is staid, tame and conventional after *Kelligrews*; the bizarre inventiveness is missing in such lines as these:

If the voyage is good, this fall I will do it;
I wants two pound ten for a ring and the priest,
A couple o' dollars for clean shirt and collars,
And a handful o' coppers to make up a feast.

This song forces no special atmosphere upon us, and evokes many similar pieces from the repertoire of generalised elegiac ballad. It might even, for some ears, share something with *The Blooming Bright Star of Belle Isle*:

One evening I rambled
To view the fair fields all alone,
Down by the banks of Loch Erin
Where beauty and pleasure were known.

We do not have to attend as minutely to this as to *Kelligrews*. And it quite misses the almost Elizabethan flavour, the slightly stilted simplicity of *Summer and Winter's* opening lines:

Flora beautiful and fair
To winter now give room;
He will rob you of your finery
And from your sweetest bloom.
It's with his eyes
His face comes in . . .

The sudden image in those last two lines gains considerable force from the seemingly guileless opening; the image blurts into the stereotyped, although melodic invocation. For the Newfoundland song is a mode of art that will carry sudden contrasts; it documents more thoroughly than most types of folk-song, and its dignity is never too precarious to admit a flash of realism. That, surely, is why it survives with the minimum of incongruity.

DON QUIXOTE AND THE PUPPETS

Theme and Structure in Robertson Davies' Drama

M. W. Steinberg

THE STRUCTURE of a play must be determined by the dramatist's effort to achieve maximum clarity and impact. Every character, situation and episode must contribute to the tone of the play, the revelation of character, the development of plot, or the unfolding of theme. To the extent that these elements are irrelevant or tangential to the playwright's intention, structure is weakened, and as a consequence the theme gets out of focus and dramatic force diminishes. This criterion of unity is perhaps the best measure of the achievement of Robertson Davies, who may well be considered Canada's leading playwright.

In *Fortune, My Foe* (1949), Davies' first full-length play, the action centres on the dilemma confronting the intellectual or the artist in Canada, who feels that he must either emigrate to the United States or remain in Canada defeated in his work by the naïve or hypocritical attitude of his countrymen. On this problem, perhaps the most persistent to engage him, recurring as it does in his novels as well as in his plays, Robertson Davies has many sharp and sad comments to make.

Nicholas, a young university instructor contemplating departure for the United States, denies the charge that he is a traitor to his country selling out his ideals and responsibilities for the fleshpots of the south. He sees behind the stereotype of America that Canadians, perhaps defensively, have established. Behind all the commercialism and vulgarity, he argues, "there is a promise, and there is no promise here, as yet, for men like me." He rejects the attempts of Rowlands, an older professor, to dissuade him from leaving Canada. Rowlands, though himself embittered long before by a similar frustration to the one that was presumably

impelling Nicholas to emigrate, queries his colleague's motives, sneering at the incentive of money and shrewdly, almost cynically, suggesting that the real reason was pressure from Vanessa, the self-willed young lady whom Nicholas wishes to marry. In part Rowlands' action may be prompted at this time by a residual affection for Canada, soured but yet abiding; but for the most part one is inclined to agree with Nicholas, who senses in the tone of Rowlands' comments a jealousy stemming from personal frustrations.

Nevertheless, as we can judge from the unwarranted fury of his reply to Rowlands' taunts about his subservience to Vanessa, Nicholas has an underlying sense of guilt about this aspect of his motivation, reluctant as he is to admit it to himself. The dramatist further weakens his hero's position, reducing to absurdity Nicholas' rather pompous claim that he seeks admission to American university life primarily in the service of culture, by showing him engaged in the scholarly task of editing a joke-book, an undertaking applauded by the American professor from whom he was expecting an offer, but labelled by Rowlands as "nonsense and shoddy, catch-penny scholarship," a species of research suggesting his insincerity.

Into this fairly straightforward situation in which the characters and their relation to each other and to the central problem are clearly delineated, Robertson Davies introduces a new element, Franz Szabo, a refugee puppet-master, a mature artist, whose puppet-show, we are told, creates an effect of "intensified reality, rather than of make-believe" and enables us to see people and situations "clear and fresh and marvellously detailed." With almost fairy-tale effect a transformation begins to take place in the chief characters.

The most significant change of all takes place in Nicholas. He had no difficulty earlier in rejecting Rowlands' argument for his remaining in Canada partly because he recognized the basis of the argument, and he could counter with personal reasons of his own, and partly because Rowlands' approach was negative, belittling the importance of money and love as motives. But Szabo presents a positive attitude towards staying in Canada, based on love of country and one's duty to it, an ideal resting on courage and hope. "This is my country now and I am not afraid of it. There may be some bad times; there may be some misunderstandings . . . The educated like my work, and the uneducated like it. As for the half-educated—well, we can only pray for them in Canada, as elsewhere . . . we artists learn very young not to mind too much. We must be tough, and hopeful, too." And Nicholas, at the play's conclusion, influenced by the example of Szabo, decides to stay in Canada, saying, "if we all run away it will never be any

better. So let the geniuses of easy virtue go southward; I know what they feel too well to blame them. But for some of us there is no choice; let Canada do what she will with us, we must stay."

The ending is somewhat pat and sentimental. The romanticism that Hugo MacPherson rightly finds underlying the satire in Davies' novels (*Canadian Literature* 4) is evident here too. But the criticism levelled at Davies by a reviewer of *Fortune, My Foe* in *Canadian Forum* that he offers no constructive suggestions concerning the loss of talented young Canadians to the United States is, of course, invalid. Though we may agree that Nicholas' decision is not based on a premise widely acceptable, the only question we are justified in asking is whether such a person as Nicholas is represented as being would arrive at such a decision. The dramatist is not obliged to offer solutions to social problems. And Nicholas' decision, we find, is in character. Davies prepares us for it by indicating Nicholas' sense of guilt in the conversation with Rowlands, and his sense of duty, of obligation to Canada, in the conversation with Vanessa. It becomes quite clear in the play that a major reason for wanting to go to the U.S. was his desire to earn enough money to marry Vanessa, but as she had already broken up their engagement, this motive is gone. But perhaps most important, Nicholas, like Szabo, is a romantic idealist at heart, and Davies makes this fact clear when he has both men choose enthusiastically the Don Quixote story for the puppet play.

The events centering around Szabo and his puppet show, though amusing and meaningful in themselves, serve the primary dramatic purpose of developing the main action and bringing about the conversion of Nicholas and changes in Rowlands and Vanessa. In these terms the play has thematic and structural unity. There is a second theme that arises out of the Szabo episode: the question as to the function and purpose of art, a question to which several answers are offered by the characters. For Ursula Simonds, a left-wing do-gooder, art or culture is but an instrument of politics, a form of propaganda. For Mr. Tapscott and Mrs. Philpott, art is an instrument of the social worker and "the handmaid of education" to be used on tot-lots or in creative character-building-courses sponsored by libraries, or YMCA's or Extension Departments of universities. These short-changers are driven out of the temple of art, i.e. Chilly's ambiguous establishment, by the enraged and cursing Professor Rowlands shouting "Anathema". Chilly, whose speakeasy is the setting of the drama, expresses a more acceptable view when he remarks that the marionette show gave him "a religious feeling", a view with which Nicholas concurs, saying "It fills a need in the heart. Why not call the feeling it arouses religious?" This theme is related to the first, for we

see that the artist Szabo and his work of art make Nicholas see into himself and effect a change of heart that results in his abandoning his false aims and accepting his responsibility.

IN HIS NEXT PLAY *At My Heart's Core* (1950) Davies is still concerned with Canada as a land of frustration in which there is almost no genteel, sophisticated society, and in which there is little interest in the arts or sciences. As a result the inhabitants who are gifted or cultured reveal a deep, though often unspoken, longing to escape. But in this play the theme does not imply criticism of Canadian society; by setting the events in the early 1800's in a sparsely settled country where pioneering conditions make inevitable hardship and deprivation, Davies shifts the emphasis from social criticism to a consideration of a human problem—the ways in which people react to their uncongenial environment. The dramatist is concerned with the unrealized dream at the heart's core and how it can be manipulated to create discontent.

Cantwell, the omniscient villain, subtly plays on the vanity of three ladies in successive interviews, giving expression and support to their hidden doubts and wishes, releasing an unhappiness which each heretofore was heroically managing to control. The women are clearly depicted, each with her own temperament and special capacity, though they are, on the whole, sketchily outlined. Cantwell, on the other hand, is presented in more ambiguous terms. He is a glib, sophisticated fellow whose realism, untouched by virtues or ideals, becomes cynicism. The ladies' somewhat self-righteous statement that they are beyond temptation suggests a way for him to rob them of their peace of mind, an action which, as the dramatist explains somewhat belatedly near the end, is prompted by a slight which Cantwell and his wife suffered at their hands. The malignancy is entirely disproportionate to the occasion and is not fully credible. One feels that Cantwell, clever and insincere, merely rationalizes the reason for his conduct, which actually is an expression of unmotivated evil. Indeed, Davies goes out of his way to present Cantwell as a satanic figure, the great tempter and destroyer of peace of mind. Though the frequent assertion by Phelim, a superstitious Irish bard-settler, that Cantwell is the Devil may not be convincing, and Cantwell's own jesting references to himself as the Devil may by themselves be ignored, the fact that Cantwell knows not only the weaknesses of each of the ladies and how to play on them, but also the circumstances of their earlier lives and associations makes him inhumanly omniscient. This ambiguity in the characterization is main-

tained to the end of the play. When Mr. Stewart impatiently tells Phelim to stop shouting that Cantwell is the Devil, "We don't have the Devil in the nineteenth century, and we certainly don't have him in this country," Cantwell ironically remarks, "What a happy state of affairs. These ladies have nothing to worry about then." And when Mrs. Moodie a few moments later asks "Who are you, to cast our sins of omission in our teeth, and to stand in judgment upon us?" Cantwell replies "That, Mrs. Moodie, is a matter which I prefer to leave in doubt." Phelim has the last word on Cantwell and his comment applies to the ladies, who, Cantwell believes, will always have doubt gnawing at their hearts, "Ah, wasn't it the big fool I was to take his coin! And sure I'll be in the Devil's own hand from this day!"

In a review of *At My Heart's Core* (*University of Toronto Quarterly*, April 1951), Vincent Tovell criticizes the plot as being contrived and the characterization of Cantwell as unsatisfactory because his behaviour is not dramatically credible. This judgment is valid if we regard the play simply as a realistic historical play. It is that, of course, and indeed is a very fine historical drama with the setting and dialogue re-creating the period honestly without the kind of quaintness that is often associated with historical dramas. The criticism is not applicable if we emphasize the symbolic nature of Cantwell and perhaps of Mr. Stewart in order to develop the underlying pattern of ideas.

Whether Cantwell is an inadequately motivated "real" character or a diabolic force, he is used as an agent by the dramatist to develop what there is of a plot and to establish his theme. The view of Cantwell as Devil relates closely the theme and structure, for the simple structure of the play with its three temptations echoes in its outline the story of Satan's triple temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. Furthermore, each temptation in *At My Heart's Core* is followed or accompanied by a blast of a horn in the distance, "clear and mysterious." This horn, as we learn later, announces the approach of Mr. Stewart, returning from a successful expedition against the rebels in Upper Canada under the discontented William Lyon MacKenzie. He comes in the aspect of a redeemer more than a match for the insidious Cantwell; his good humour and good sense clear the atmosphere which has been poisoned by Cantwell's flattery and deceitful sentimentalism, qualities which the tempter shares with Shaw's Devil in *Man and Superman*, but which in *At My Heart's Core* thinly disguise malice. Stewart also is the supreme authority in the district, but though he puts the adversary in his power he cannot wholly undo his work. Where he does succeed is where love exists. His love for his wife, full and unqualified, evokes in her a similar response

and enables her to redeem herself and thus defeat Cantwell's effort. Earlier she did not hear the horn announcing her husband's coming, though she usually did, because she was at the time heeding Cantwell's words, but now she realizes that what Cantwell roused in her "was not regret, but discontentment, disguised as regret."

Like *Fortune, My Foe, At My Heart's Core* has basically a very simple structure. Into the initial situation an outsider is introduced, in the former a Czech refugee artist, and in the latter a mysterious stranger, whose view of life makes the other characters examine theirs. In *Fortune, My Foe* the resolution is simple: the young hero romantically accepts the new vision, that of the mature artist and decides to remain in Canada, foregoing a supposed benefit out of a sense of duty. The resolution in *At My Heart's Core* is somewhat more complex. The three women are affected by Cantwell's view of life, a bad one in this case. What would have happened to Mrs. Traill and Mrs. Moodie as a consequence we do not know, for they are fortunately rescued from the situation which was presumably the basis of their discontent when their husbands, unfit as pioneers, are given government posts in York, where their talents as officers can be put to better use. Perhaps one might say that out of the somewhat remote "evil" of MacKenzie's rebellion came this "good" to these noble ladies, an extension of grace to those on the verge of "falling". Mrs. Stewart's fate is more positive and rewarding. She definitely rejects the tempter when she gains new insight, helped perhaps by the power of love.

Despite the more involved resolution of the issue in *At My Heart's Core*, there is greater structural complexity and unity in *Fortune, My Foe*. The sub-plot in the earlier play, or to be more exact, the second strand of action, involving the new though closely related theme—that of the function of art—which centers on Franz Szabo and his puppets, bears closely on the first theme which involves the unsatisfactory consideration accorded art and culture in Canada, and the intellectual's responsibility to the country which slights him. In fact, as we have seen, the Szabo episode produces significant changes in the major characters and leads to the resolution of Nicholas' problem. It is otherwise in *At My Heart's Core*, however, where the delightfully original sub-plot involving Phelim, the besotted Irish ex-bard and his foster-child "wife", is not clearly or significantly related to the main plot. The dramatist uses Phelim as a device for getting Cantwell to stay at the Stewarts, but this end could have been achieved in a less elaborate way. Insofar as the Phelim subplot provides some commentary on the main action and much comic relief, it does contribute to the total effect of the play, but it is not

closely integrated with the main plot, neither strand of action depending seriously on the other.

ROBERTSON DAVIES in *Fortune, My Foe* is chiefly concerned with the ideas he treats rather than with the characters through whom he presents the ideas in action. Even though, as we have seen, there is development in the character of Nicholas and his conversion is made credible, the treatment of character is superficial. In general, this judgement applies also to *At My Heart's Core*, although here the dramatist, dealing with a problem more deeply rooted in human feelings and one that has universal aspects, creates characters who are more clearly realized, and indeed genuine pathos emerges. His primary interest, however, is still in the idea that runs through the play—the heartbreak and loneliness in the wilderness and the effect of temptation in these circumstances. He examines the effect on three ladies, proving their vulnerability, but in so doing he fails to explore in depth the complex of motives and feelings involved in each case: he presents one and moves on, paying almost equal attention to each. He comes closest to realizing idea through character in the rather moving scene between Mrs. Stewart and her husband at the very end of the play.

In *A Jig for the Gypsy* (1954) Davies is still absorbed more by the ideas he is considering than by his characters, though the character of Benoni is probably more many-sided than any other he has attempted. The structural pattern of *A Jig for the Gypsy* in a sense reverses that of *At My Heart's Core*. Instead of having one person come into the established setting and in the course of events interview separately the three central figures there, we get one key figure established in the one place, and the other characters all come to visit her. As the play develops we get again three major separate interviews. This use of parallel situations within a play gives a certain structural unity to the material, which is reinforced by the fact that Benoni's personality and values figure largely in each episode, as Cantwell's did in the earlier play. But the discussions and the interviews in *At My Heart's Core* have a closer thematic relationship than those in *A Jig for the Gypsy*.

A Jig for the Gypsy lacks the clear focus the other plays possess. Davies cleverly satirizes politicians, their motives and behaviour, through a diversity of characters, bumptious and scheming, in whom strong feelings are aroused over petty issues. At the same time he shows the emptiness of the politician's dream, the disillusionment that accompanies even political success. Even more mockingly he satirizes

the so-called idealist through the "romantic" Edward Vaughan, who worships abstract principles and exalts the working class and who, like his disciple, the starry-eyed Bronwen, is ready to spout Ruskin at the ennobling sight of a labourer dully performing his chores.

The most important theme in the play, however, is that of love and marriage. Benoni, a free-souled realist who cannot abide the rigid restrictive code by which the "moral" middle class lives, urges Bronwen to love many young men before she marries. She does so not because, as the conventional people like to believe, the gypsy is lustful and overvalues physical love and undervalues marriage. Quite the contrary. It is the so-called modest people, like Bronwen, who by idealizing sex place too much emphasis on it. Benoni advocates experience in love not as an end in itself but as a preparation for marriage. Nor, furthermore, is physical love to be considered as the purpose of this important union. "There's more to marriage than four bare legs in a blanket," she tells a shocked Bronwen. Later Conjuror Jones makes precisely the same remark to Benoni when she hesitates to marry him because of his age, and he adds that the firmest foundation for a marriage is a joint interest.

Robertson Davies seems to take here, as in the other themes, an anti-romantic position. To be truly joyful one must learn to live with reality, and one must avoid creating abstractions, ideals, supported by a host of taboos, which obscure or reject reality. The trouble with the world, says Conjuror Jones, is that it keeps nagging itself; it takes a perverted pleasure in its denials. Actually Davies is not so much anti-romantic as opposed to conventionalized romanticism, or sentimentalism, which is in fact the arch-enemy of true romanticism. This in part is the gist of Benoni's advice to Bronwen. And though Benoni accepts Conjuror Jones because it is the sensible thing to do, she does not idealise this union as she did an earlier one with Rhodri Lloyd which was based on love. "What I felt with Rhodri Lloyd was true love. It was as sweet and fair as the daffodils in the spring."

Davies' earlier plays also have much satire, often directed at the same targets as those in *A Jig for the Gypsy*, but it is largely incidental, growing out of the dialogue, and it does not hinder the development of the central theme. In *A Jig for the Gypsy* almost equal attention is given to various episodes and the effect is that strength is lost. Benoni, who is perhaps the only unifying element, acts more as the agent affecting others, like Szabo and Cantwell, than the chief figure in a plot. And perhaps equally serious, what would seem to be the most important theme ends rather lamely with the marriage of Benoni and Conjuror

Jones. While this marriage may be so apt as to have been made in heaven and while we may agree with Davies that "it is a union of two people of extraordinary character and outlook, as a defense against a world which is becoming more and more unfriendly toward their kind," dramatically it is inappropriate because Conjuror Jones seemingly is introduced at the end only to help Davies dispose happily of Benoni.

All in all, the plays of Robertson Davies are a substantial contribution to drama in Canada. The comic spirit which pervades them, expressing itself through language, situation and character, in a variety of modes, is unexcelled in Canadian writing. Davies has also given evidence of considerable originality and skill in creating and projecting character. Such characters as Phelim, Mrs. Stewart and Benoni not only substantiate this claim but indicate something of the breadth of his range. It is unfortunate that in no case in his plays does he explore characters in depth—for the most part they are used as a means to present or develop ideas. It is, of course, not unusual in comedies to find the dramatist subordinating character to situation or to his interest in themes dealing with social conventions or institutions. Many of Davies' themes involve satiric thrusts at the rigid and doctrinaire forces in society, the pompous, and the unrealistically sentimental, whether in personal relations or in social values. But, underlying his satire, Davies offers directly or by implication, through such characters as Pop, Szabo, the Stewarts and Benoni, a positive vision of life. In addition, he has given evidence of superb craftsmanship; his plays move quickly, the scenes following one another quite naturally. At his best his plays achieve a considerable degree of unity of structure and theme. When he falls short, in this respect, as he does at times, it is because he is undone by the delight in ideas and zest for fun that constitute his most attractive qualities. Because his fancy is alert and comprehensive he attempts to crowd too much into his plays, without due regard for the discipline of his form. As a result, while the constant play of wit on a wide variety of themes may amuse and impress, this breadth diminishes the dramatic force that comes from concentration on a given theme. Another weakness, one to which writers of comedy, particularly of satire, are prone, lies in the dialogue. While for the most part the language is adequate—trite when triteness is called for, vulgar or genteel as these qualities are expected—the dialogue at times reveals startling incongruities and often fails to distinguish adequately the characters. These flaws, however, in the context of the entire work, are minor. The plays are eminently stageworthy and are a valuable contribution to a genre that Canadian talent has unfortunately neglected.

LETTER FROM TORONTO

Robert McCormack

THERE IS A SENSE in which Toronto must be, for its size and age, the least literary city in North America. I do not mean that it has no writers. I shall be saying in a moment that it has quite a number. Nor do I mean that it rejects them, although this is closer to the truth. It would be truer, however, to say that it evades them. And it does this in so many ways as almost to suggest conscious effort. In fact, there are times when one finds oneself believing in some kind of sinister plot to keep the city forever unavailable to the imaginations of its citizens. That way lies paranoia. But two events of the past year may illustrate what I mean.

The first is the "rediscovery" of Morley Callaghan, which took place, as everyone must by now know, last November. In its pure or newspaper form this story has all the simplicity and mass appeal of the best soap opera—the poor young writer from the provinces who makes good in the Big Time but then returns to his native city where he is ignored, his books banned by the public libraries or scorned by hick reviewers and left unread by a doltish populace, until, after years of obscurity, he is rescued from oblivion by a shrewd national magazine (*MacLean's*) and reclaimed for world literature by "the Dean of American critics" in the pages of an international one (*The New Yorker*). Needless to say, this is caricature. Still, it does have some basis in fact. Mr. Callaghan's books, including those set in this city, have frequently been greeted with less than wild enthusiasm. And perhaps we should also allow it a sort of "mythic" truth. For it seems possible that Toronto *wants* to believe in it. In the last paragraph of his *New Yorker*

article, Edmund Wilson suggested that the reason for "the current underestimation of Morley Callaghan" is simply "a general incapacity—apparently shared by his compatriots—for believing that a writer whose work may be mentioned without absurdity in association with Chekhov's and Turgenev's can possibly exist in our day in Toronto." This magisterial statement permits us to feel at once proud that we have produced a great writer and guilty that we have neglected him, and there are few combinations of feeling that your true Torontonian relishes more. "There's a moral in the story," observed *The Toronto Star* with stern satisfaction. "It is that, despite the currently fashionable outcry about preserving Canadian culture, too many of us fail to recognize native artistic talent when it stares us in the face. The fact is evident in our stolid ignorance of Callaghan's genius in our midst." But it remains to be seen whether "genius in our midst" will now be more readily recognized, or whether the whole story, moral and all, is not simply another way of avoiding real contact with it. Will this curious affair have, for example, any lasting effect on the sales of Mr. Callaghan's books? I am told that, as one might expect, sales of *The Many Colored Coat* increased considerably in both the United States and Canada after the appearance of the Wilson article. But it would be a rash prophet who would predict that Morley Callaghan would ever be a run-away best-seller in his home town.

But Toronto does have its best-sellers. The second event I referred to a moment ago is the success here of Phyllis Brett Young's novel *The Torontonians*. It has been on the Public Library's ten-most-popular list practically since its publication last October. So here, apparently, is an instance of the city grappling with an image of itself. Mrs. Young's story requires her heroine to do a great deal of brooding over the differences between the new suburb which she inhabits for most of the book and the old Toronto where she grew up. I don't think there can be much doubt that this contrast, and more particularly the much-lingered-over portrait of the old city, have had a good deal to do with the popularity of the book locally. But *The Torontonians* is women's magazine fiction. The thematic contrast sags into opposed clichés, or even into a mere conflict of status symbols. And as for the portrait of old Toronto, what emerges from a wealth of evocative detail is not a real city but a town called Nostalgia with which we are already overfamiliar. Once again we have escaped literature. Perhaps the late Gilbert Harding was right, at least as far as writers are concerned, when he declared with his usual finality: "Toronto is *not* a good address."

Yet Toronto is the address for a good proportion of the country's writers, and presumably they find something interesting in the place or at least something

convenient about living in it. One thing they do not find, however, is each other. I think it was W. H. Auden who once defined an American intellectual as someone who knows all the public transportation routes. I doubt if this entirely applies here. Toronto writers are not usually rich and they are scattered in every direction about the vast metropolitan sprawl the city has become. But it is my impression that, aside from the occasional party for a visiting celebrity, they seldom meet. No doubt in some cases this is just as well. Certainly I do not want to suggest that there should be some kind of "Toronto Authors' Association" with weekly meetings. The mere idea is enough to put any writer on the next plane for Ibiza. There is a good deal to be said, too, for the absence of the kind of ingrown clique that can be the curse of provincial literary life. But cliques can also be productive (in which case they are usually called "movements" or "groups"), and the lack of any real sense of community can make life more difficult than it needs to be. Some talents need relative isolation to work at all, but even they can have too much of it, and for many, isolation can be both discouraging and damaging. This applies particularly to the young, and it is of course the young who are most actively doing something about it. They are not alone, however, and I must attempt to brighten the possibly rather grey picture I have been sketching.

One of the oddest developments of the past year has been the appearance of a number of more or less amateur night clubs with a literary turn as part of the entertainment. Perhaps six or seven of the places I have in mind have sprung up recently in various cellars, garrets, old barns and abandoned warehouses in the downtown area. They are usually called something like The Village Corner or The Purple Onion and have in common a devotion to espresso coffee (the drinks are always non-alcoholic), a generally murky atmosphere, a taste for abstract painting of uncompromising ferocity, and a clientele of roughly undergraduate age or a little older. Most of them specialize either in jazz or in folk-singing (which seems, at least locally, to have regained the position it held in the late 1940's). But some, as I say, also offer literature. The First Floor Club, for example, used to harbour from time to time something called "Vocal Magazine". This consisted of poets and short story writers reading from their works interspersed with comedy routines, interpretative dancing and what-not. I gather it is now defunct. But the Thursday "Literary Evenings" at the Bohemian Embassy continue under the direction of John Robert Colombo. Here such poets as Milton Acorn and Padraig O'Broin read, and there are folk-singers, 16 mm. films and jazz. It is difficult to take all this very seriously. Too much of the tone is summed up in the Bohemian Embassy's somewhat wistful description of one

of its performers as a "young Toronto poet who has been to California". Nevertheless, the audiences are enthusiastic, a great deal of energy is given some kind of literary direction, and, as one of the poets remarked to me, "This city is alive."

On a rather different level are the Contact Poetry Readings. In their second year, these are now organized by Raymond Souster and have moved from the small art gallery where they began to the YM-YWHA whose Arts Council has since last October been a co-sponsor. With the aid of a Canada Council grant they have this season been presenting not only such poets as Francis Sparshott, George Johnston and (again) Milton Acorn, but also a number of Americans imported for the occasion—Leroi Jones, Louis Zukofsky and in the new year Cid Corman (editor of the about-to-be-revived *Origin*). The quality of the poetry is a good deal higher here and the whole enterprise considerably more serious. This may be part of the trouble. In any case, the milieu does not seem to suit the Muse. The YM-YWHA is a new building with all that means in terms of bright lights, low ceilings, and a large expanse of heavily draped window. Acoustically, it would deprive a bull-frog of resonance and it tends to reduce all but the loudest poets to something close to inaudibility. The audiences, too, although there is usually a sprinkling from the coffee houses, are on the whole older and inclined to solemnity. They frequently seem to have difficulty responding naturally or spontaneously to the astonishing presence in their midst of an actual, living poet. But one must be grateful to Mr. Souster that a poet, often a distinguished one, is in fact there.

In the more traditional form of the literary magazine there have also been changes and new developments in the past year. *The Tamarack Review* has undergone a reorganization from which Robert Weaver has emerged as a kind of editor-in-chief over the old editorial board. It is perhaps too early to tell whether this presages any change in policy, but the first issue (Autumn, 1960) with Mr. Weaver on top of the masthead suggests it does not. This is both encouraging and disappointing: encouraging because the magazine has maintained a remarkably high standard of writing over the past four years; disappointing because it seems to me that *Tamarack* suffers from a lack of focus, a vagueness of purpose that sometimes blurs its impact. Of course there are also dangers in a purpose too sharply defined, and some of them are perhaps illustrated by the new semi-annual *Alphabet* edited and (literally) printed by James Reaney in London, Ontario. *Alphabet* stems more or less, according to the editor, from the criticism of Northrop Frye, and Mr. Reaney is very clear about what he wants—"a small secret looking book devoted to the proposition that it is very interesting

mankind should answer the terrors of the inner and the outer world with a symbolic fruit and an iconic sea-beast." The contents of the first issue, with one or two exceptions, follows this line and it is all interesting stuff. But it does read sometimes as if it had been written in an ashram somewhere on the Brahmaputra. I have to confess to prejudice here, however, since for some reason I have never been able to work up the hatred and contempt for science apparently necessary to the true believer in iconic sea-beasts. In addition to *Alphabet*, there have been one or two other new publications of which the most substantial is *Evidence*, a quarterly edited by Kenneth Craig. I am afraid that the contents of this one belong to a category I can only describe as "beatnickery".

Finally, I realize that although I have said there are quite a few writers in Toronto I have really said very little about most of them. This is because they are at the moment busy writing and there is nothing to be said about that except that, with luck, 1961 should be a good year not just for writers here but for literature in Canada.



A TALE RETOLD

Hugo McPherson

MORLEY CALLAGHAN. *The Many Colored Coat*. Macmillan. \$4.50.

FIVE YEARS ago *Maclean's* magazine awarded Callaghan's short novel, *The Man With the Coat*, a five thousand dollar prize. This story, the source of the new novel, is the history of Harry Lane, a carefree young public relations man whose unsuspecting friendliness involved him in a fraud trial; though he was merely a witness against the accused, the affair ruined his reputation and his career. In defiance of this freak of justice, Harry parades about Montreal in a shoddy sports jacket made for him by a prize-fighter-turned-respectable-tailor—the very man whose public testimony had stained him with suspicion. In the end, the prize-fighter-tailor, no longer able to bear the reproach of seeing Harry in the tattered coat, strikes him a blow which breaks his neck; and then, recognizing too late that he, not Harry, had made the coat—that Harry Lane had never been a fraud—he becomes an apostle, a convert who proclaims the innocence of the crucified Harry Lane.

This story, with its angry revelation of the world's habit of judging and destroying its innocents (particularly when

they protest their innocence, as Harry did) marks a major turning point in Callaghan's exploration of experience. To appreciate why he *had to* retell it in *The Many Colored Coat*, and what the retelling reveals about his developing vision we must look briefly at the road behind him. In the early phase of his journey, dating from *Strange Fugitive* (1928), Callaghan cross-examined unsparingly the claims of the politician, the humanist, the sociologist and the priest as guides to enduring value, and ended, in *Such is My Beloved* (1934), by making a broad if unorthodox religious affirmation. In this novel, a priest who had attempted to reclaim two prostitutes is confined by his bishop to a mental hospital—forced, so to speak, to “give up his own mind”. But if the officers of the temporal church are fallible, the priest (even though he is “mad” in the eyes of the world) has discovered the timeless truth of “the Church in her implicit being . . . the Church not of this world, Love”. This affirmation of a transcendent love that cuts across all the lines of man's temporal patterns and institutions was a first turning point for

Callaghan, but it confronted him with a new problem. If man commits himself to a value that exists *out of time*, how can he survive the terrible pressures of a conventional, self-regarding world?

In attempting to answer this question Callaghan turned to the classic dilemma of the individual whose vision differs radically from the mores and institutionalized truths of his society. Shaw's Saint Joan, perhaps, was his archetype of the innocent, and like her the protagonists of the next three novels were all destroyed: Kip Caley, the reformed bank robber of *More Joy in Heaven* (1937), was shot by the officers of a community which had welcomed him as its prodigal son until he revealed his desire to redeem all criminals; Peggy Sanderson, heroine of the beautifully constructed novel *The Loved and the Lost* (1951), died because neither the upper-caste whites of Westmount nor the negro untouchables of Montreal's lower town could believe in her disinterested love; and Harry Lane, the glad-hand public relations man (appropriately the representative of a distillery) died because the "sober" members of his community judged him by the same narrow laws of acquisitiveness and decorum that governed their own lives.

But if the prize-winning *Maclean's* account of Harry Lane's martyrdom revealed mankind's neanderthal instinct to stone the individual who questions the value of the tribe, it did not solve the riddle which Callaghan had proposed at the end of *Such Is My Beloved*: Can a man be innocent in the contemporary world and survive the stings of its self-righteous disapproval? Like Saint Joan, Kip Caley, and Peggy Sanderson, the Harry Lane of the *Maclean's* story be-

came a martyr—a crucified ideal. Yet Harry's destruction did not close the subject of innocence for Callaghan, for a final question remained (a question which he had hinted at as early as 1935): If the innocent risks physical death by defying temporal values, or embraces spiritual death by compromising with them, is it possible that he himself has helped to create these terrible alternatives? Is innocence a form of pride? This is the question that Callaghan turns to in *The Many Colored Coat*; and he answers it with rare authority and subtlety.

In Callaghan's retelling (at more than double the length of the original) Harry Lane survives his ordeal, not at the price of losing his innocence but of recognizing that innocence entails both dangers and exceptional responsibilities. By emphasizing in his new title Harry's relation to Joseph, the favoured son of the many-coloured coat, Callaghan underlines his hero's inexperience. Harry's urbane background and his freedom from the hard necessities which force most men to struggle and scrimp and calculate make him at once an object of envy and a man who is completely unarmed with knowledge of the world. Thus, when his estimate of man's integrity proves unfounded—when an erring bank manager, hoping to spare his family humiliation, allows the prize-fighter-tailor's incriminating and mistaken evidence to stand uncontradicted—when this disaster strikes, Harry, with the glistering probity of a Conrad hero, sets out to vindicate his pristine image of himself. He wears the coat of guilt which his judges have made for him—wears it defiantly to tax them and haunt them with the knowledge that they value their social status

more than truth. And in following his vision of an ideal justice he alienates all of the people who are important in his world: his employer, his sweetheart (the daughter of a judge), his journalist friends, his professional buddies. His only advocate, indeed, is Annie Laurie, a wonderfully maternal tart who embraces the human condition without prejudice, whose compassion and acceptance of life includes both the erring bank manager and Harry Lane. From this gloriously humane outcast Harry at last learns the tolerance and love which he had lacked. As the novel ends, he is prepared to mingle with the jostling crowd on St. Catherine Street. He will be terrifyingly alone, he realizes, but he has learned that "innocence was like a two-edged sword without a handle . . . if you gripped it and used it, it cut you so painfully you had to lash out blindly, seeking vengeance on someone for the bleeding." Recent literature has produced no better image of the paradox of temporal and eternal, experience and innocence.

The Statement of *The Many Colored Coat* compared with the frantic escapism of America's "beat" novelists is mature and durable. The flight of Jack Kerouac's heroes to high and holy plateaux in Mexico is powerful if hallucinated romance. Callaghan, by contrast, looks steadily at the contemporary scene and probes with a deceptive gentleness through its best-conceived disguises. Yet for all this *The Many Colored Coat* is not an entirely satisfying novel. In a thanksgiving review in the *New Yorker* (Nov. 26, 1960) Edmund Wilson describes Callaghan as "a writer whose work may be mentioned without absurdity in association with Chekov's and Turgenev's." This comment, I believe,

is a valid estimate of the subtlety of Callaghan's vision, but it neglects the equally relevant question of style.

Since World War I we have come to honour the unobtrusive reportorial style so highly that we forget its triumphs of precision in Swift and Flaubert and Hemingway, and succumb to the illusion that a good style is really "no style at all." Callaghan's best short stories are models of the pellucid, flexible and apparently effortless prose which Swift described as "proper words in proper places." In *The Many Colored Coat*, however, this simplicity often becomes a bland reflex, slippery with participles, progressive tenses and generalized diction—a casual cloak which obscures the articulated muscle and bone of the Joseph beneath. It is unreasonable, perhaps, to demand that the winnowed vision of maturity be projected with the immediacy and intensity of youthful discovery: mature vision and passionate immediacy are rarely found in combination. Nevertheless, the texture and colour of Callaghan's retailored coat are less rewarding than its substance. But the figure of Harry Lane is as real in this century as it was for the biblical writer. One leaves the book with the hope that Harry, like Joseph, may yet win the understanding of his brethren.



LA POESIE DE NELLIGAN

Gerard Tougas

PAUL WYCZYNSKI. *Emile Nelligan, sources et originalité de son œuvre*. Editions de l'Université d'Ottawa.

CET IMPORTANT OUVRAGE vient clore plus d'un demi-siècle d'études nelliganiennes. Il manquait à Emile Nelligan, le premier grand poète de la littérature canadienne-française, une claire définition de sa brève mais significative œuvre poétique. Il fallait, avant de pouvoir situer Nelligan avec exactitude, dépister les nombreuses sources de son inspiration, les soupeser, puis arriver à une conclusion concernant la part qui revient à son génie propre. Or, comme le remarque avec justesse M. Wyczynski, si tous les critiques ont évoqué les noms de Verlaine, de Baudelaire et de tant d'autres poètes français qui auraient influencé Nelligan à ses débuts, ces rapprochements, toujours vagues, n'autorisaient aucune conclusion motivée quant à la valeur intrinsèque de son œuvre.

M. Wyczynski, avec une rare patience, a épluché toutes les revues qu'auraient pu lire Nelligan pendant sa fulgurante carrière de trois années; chaque piste ainsi découverte a été suivie jusqu'à sa source. Dans la première partie de sa minutieuse enquête, Wyczynski étudie chronologiquement le développement de Nelligan, d'après ses lectures et les imitations que celles-ci lui auraient inspirées.

L'influence directe de Millevoye, qui se fait sentir au début de 1896, entraîne la conviction du lecteur; celle de Chénier paraît être une simple rencontre. Wyc-

zynski fait preuve d'une ingéniosité indiscutable lorsqu'il déchiffre pour nous l'origine du pseudonyme Emile Kovar. Quant à l'effet produit sur la sensibilité de Nelligan par sa découverte de Baudelaire et de Verlaine, le grand mérite de Wyczynski est de préciser cet effet, de façon à faire ressortir, par le rapprochement des imitations et des modèles, le génie naissant du poète canadien. Enfin, les pages consacrées à l'influence de Rodenbach et de Rollinat retiennent notre attention, ne serait-ce que parce que jusqu'ici, le rôle catalytique de ces deux poètes n'avait pas été suffisamment souligné.

Abandonnant sa méthode chronologique, probablement parce qu'il n'était plus possible de suivre d'assez près la marche de Nelligan, Wyczynski consacre les trois chapitres qui suivent à des aspects particuliers du poète: son âme religieuse, son idéal, son acheminement vers la folie. Le dernier chapitre est une étude technique de la musicalité du vers nelliganien. Une très brève conclusion résume le travail accompli.

M. Wyczynski, qui est le Directeur du Centre de recherches en littérature canadienne-française à l'Université d'Ottawa, a réussi dans son dessein: rendre moins obscur le mystère de la création poétique de Nelligan. L'importance de sa contribution aux études nel-

liganiennes peut se juger par la question que l'on doit maintenant se poser: que reste-t-il aux futurs exégètes de Nelligan? Pour répondre à cette question, il est nécessaire d'examiner de plus près la méthode de travail de M. Wyczynski.

La recherche des sources, telle que l'entend Wyczynski, est un legs de la critique historique du dix-neuvième siècle. Elle repose sur cette idée, qu'avant de pouvoir admirer à bon escient, le critique doit s'assurer qu'il a entre les mains le prototype, non l'imitation. La difficulté—on s'en est tôt aperçu—provient du fait que toute œuvre ressemble à une ou à plusieurs autres œuvres. En outre, il est extrêmement difficile de prouver, à moins d'une déclaration formelle de l'auteur en question, que l'influence de tel écrivain, de telle page a été consciemment subie. Les critiques qui

ont fait des découvertes imaginaires d'influences "directes" sont légion. C'est en raison des difficultés inhérentes au genre que la recherche des sources est aujourd'hui entreprise avec beaucoup de circonspection.

Il est évident que les sources mises à jour par Wyczynski sont ou certaines, ou probables, ou possibles. Un rapide examen des très nombreuses sources analysées révèle que seule une minorité d'entre elles sont à peu près certaines. Voyons ce qu'il advient du "Vaisseau d'or," le plus célèbre des sonnets de Nelligan et celui auquel sont consacrées une dizaine de pages.

D'abord, Wyczynski fait état des théories émises par Alfred Desrochers et Luc Lacourcière, deux "sourciers" parmi ses prédécesseurs. L'origine de notre sonnet remonterait, selon Desrochers, au

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244 PAGES 6 x 9 INCHES \$5.50

University of Toronto Press

"Bard" de Thomas Gray, et selon Lacourcière, à *Une saison en enfer* de Rimbaud. Remarquons qu'il s'agit là de deux suppositions, non de sources authentiques. Wyczynski suggère d'autres sources et quelques-unes parmi celles-ci nous semblent plus près de la réalité.

Choissant comme point de départ le symbole central du vaisseau, Wyczynski, textes à l'appui, démontre que c'est là un des thèmes principaux de toute l'évolution de Nelligan, à partir de 1897. Ce thème correspond à la jeunesse du poète. Puis, ayant établi au début de sa démonstration la filiation avec Baudelaire et Rodenbach, Wyczynski compte sept exemples du vaisseau utilisé comme image poétique dans *Les fleurs du mal* et deux autres chez Rodenbach. Enfin, un exemple tiré de Rollinat semble indiquer que Nelligan s'en est probablement inspiré.

C'est à partir de ce moment que le lecteur sera tenté de fausser compagnie à son guide. Oubliant qu'il est question d'un simple sonnet pour lequel il serait abusif de trouver des sources pour chacun de ses quatorze vers, Wyczynski ajoute à sa première liste les noms de Joseph Autran et de Fernand Gregh. Chemin faisant il déclare: "... nous ne pouvons nous empêcher de citer deux strophes de "La barge d'or" du Vicomte de Borelly, où le navire est taillé de la même manière que celui de Nelligan." Puis, Wyczynski de conclure: "On ne serait pas surpris de voir Nelligan collégien découper ce poème et le garder dans son carnet personnel." (p. 240) Le lecteur, à son tour, ne doit pas être surpris de trouver réunis dans cette compagnie d'autres invités. En effet, sous les pressantes comparaisons de Wyczynski, Viélé-Griffin, Millevoye et Lamartine

viennent s'ajouter au cercle déjà trop nombreux.

Quelle conclusion tirer de ce périple poétique? Simplement que Rodenbach, Baudelaire et Rollinat ont inspiré, beaucoup plus probablement que ne l'ont fait Thomas Gray et Rimbaud, "Le vaisseau d'or" de Nelligan. Cette relative certitude permet à Wyczynski de nous expliquer le sens d'un vers resté obscur:

Dégoût, Haine et Névrose entre eux ont disputés.

Les trois "marins profanes" sont sortis des œuvres de Rodenbach, de Baudelaire et de Rollinat. Quant au reste de l'échafaudage, il doit rester dans le domaine des suppositions pures et simples.

Cet exemple nous autorise à juger de la valeur d'ensemble d'*Emile Nelligan, sources et originalité de son œuvre*. Par ce que cet ouvrage contient de découvertes indiscutables ou même probables, il constitue une clef du monde nelliganien qui fera longtemps autorité. La patience de détective et la sûre érudition avec lesquelles l'auteur a examiné toutes les sources imaginables de l'œuvre de Nelligan est digne de tous les éloges et écarte la possibilité que le même travail puisse être refait profitablement, du moins dans ses grandes lignes.

Ceci admis, il faut reconnaître que Wyczynski eût beaucoup gagné à ne pas conduire le lecteur par toutes les pistes qui, à un moment donné de son enquête, ont pu lui paraître prometteuses. Plus irritant encore est l'usage qui est fait des citations. Le critique ne nous épargne aucun philosophe, aucun écrivain parmi ses préférés. A compter de la première page de son Introduction, où sont entassées des références à Gaëtan Picon, Jean Duvignaud, Sully Prud'homme, d'An-

nunzio, un panorama de la pensée européenne se déroule devant le lecteur, qui ne s'attendait pas à un tel festin pour honorer le seul Nelligan.

Lorsque, dans son dernier chapitre, "Le secret musical," Wyczynski en arrive à l'originalité du poète, il commente fort heureusement la qualité particulière de la poésie de Nelligan: "L'originalité des rimes de Nelligan ne résulte donc point des désinences joliment composés de trois éléments phoniques; elle ressort plutôt de la justesse du ton que la rime ajoute au flou du lyrisme." Mais encore aimerait-on être sûr, après tant d'influences

dépistées, que tous les exemples choisis soient purs, débarrassés autant que possible de toute pensée étrangère.

Les futurs exégètes de Nelligan s'engageront sans doute vers une redéfinition de son œuvre. Gérard Bessette vient de traiter Nelligan très différemment (*Les images en poésie canadienne-française*, Beauchemin, 1960, pp. 215-274). D'autres viendront qui, demandant à Paul Wyczynski le secours de son érudition, tâcheront de trouver le mot d'un secret qui, pour lui, ne se définit pas et "se devine à peine".

A CALL TO THE CLERISY

S. E. Read

ROBERTSON DAVIES, *A Voice from the Attic*. McClelland & Stewart. \$5.00.

THE ATTIC is "America's attic"—Canada—and the "voice" is that of Robertson Davies, critic, novelist, playwright, wit, humanist, actor, teacher, editor, publisher, and bibliophile, but above all passionate lover of literature, who stands firm in his belief that books are still a shaping power for good in this world of chaos and uncertainty. His comments on Daniel George might well be applied to himself:

He is a deeply and curiously learned man, and one of the few critics of our time whose good opinion is a great compliment. One receives the impression from his writings that he makes it his plan to read any book whatever that no one else can bear to read. He seeks dated books of travel, moribund theology, discredited

science, and outmoded poets, and from them he culls . . . little gems . . . His essays are not intended primarily to make you laugh; [he] does not crack jokes. Rather, the climate of his mind is so salubrious, so invigorating, that dull thoughts and heavy cares are dispelled by contact with it.

Mr. Davies is a scholar, but a merry scholar, who despises pedantry and the sour academic, who lashes out at irascible critics, and who utters a clarion call to his readers to join him in the ranks of the "awakened clerisy".

"Clerisy" is a precious word, and, though Mr. Davies would have it otherwise, I doubt that it ever passed as common currency in the English language. But use it he must for it "has no familiar

synonym" and is "little known because what it describes has disappeared".

But what does the word describe? What is it that has disappeared?

The clerisy are those who read for pleasure, but not for idleness; who read for pastime but not to kill time; who love books, but do not live by books.

In years past, especially in the 19th century, the clerisy, he says, held "sovereignty in the world of letters". Through being united it wielded great power, but now, alas! if it exists at all, it is disunited, and "has been persuaded to abdicate its power by several groups . . . , which are part of the social and business organization of our time." Awake, then, oh Clerisy! Shake the slumber from your eyes; gird up your loins; and go forth once again, as your forebears did, to fight the battle for good books, good reading, and a better culture. Such is Mr. Davies' clarion call, and such the stated purpose of the book. But Mr. Davies is not really a pugnacious batta-

lion commander, leading his Christian soldiers once again to war. Having uttered the call in his opening pages, he then gets down to his real purpose—to entertain the reader (with some Johnsonian instruction thrown in for good measure) through a series of brilliantly written essays on books and on reading.

To describe the book in detail is impossible. True, it does have a stated unity ("Reading is my theme"), but this allows for much pleasant wandering, chiefly within the time confines of the 19th and 20th centuries, though occasionally into earlier ages. But Mr. Davies is no ordinary reader. Rather he is possessed of a daemon, a curiosity that drives him into obscure, dusty places (the attics of literature), and in them he rummages with such obvious delight that most readers must feel delight with him. Take for example his chapter, "Enjoying and Enduring", the section of the book that laughingly discusses such works as Howard's *Word Power*, Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking*, or Steincrohn's *Live Longer and Enjoy It*: it takes for its opening, not one of these 20th century guides to lovely life, but rather a real attic-piece, Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help*, with *Illustrations of Character and Conduct*, a work of the middle 19th century, which Mr. Davies discusses with great relish. With even greater relish and more exuberance he introduces the modern reader to Fowler, the phrenologist, who wrote a pioneer work, *Science of Life*, in the field of sex education, and to Pye Henry Chevasse, author of another noted book on sex, *Man's Strength and Woman's Beauty*.

This love of the forgotten book is further illustrated in sparkling comments on Henry Cockton's novel, *Valentine*



Vox the Ventriloquist (a Victorian best-seller), on *Joe Miller's Jests or the Wit's Vade-Mecum* (that most famous of 18th century joke books), or on *Puniana*, so aptly advertised as "An Awfully Jolly Book for Parties".

These portions of *A Voice from the Attic* are brilliant fun, but to over-stress them is to do the book as a whole an injustice. For in nearly all cases the discussions of these works (and many others like them) are but prologues to deeply serious and sharp, razor-edge comments on some of the great and really significant writers of our own age, as well as on some writers who have achieved popularity without true greatness.

With a sure touch and with astonishing agility Mr. Davies moves rapidly from the works of Havelock Ellis, Freud, and Jung to the novels of Joyce Cary

or the humour of Stephen Leacock. He discusses at some length the reading of drama and its relationship to live theatre. He looks at some of the problems that face the creative writer and briefly peers into those wells of inspiration from which writers take sustenance. He gives a cool appraisal of Maugham, the novelist (he "is a masterly conjurer, but we can only be deceived once"), and takes a close look at *The Robe* (that prime example of a best-seller by the "Lutheran Dumas", Lloyd Douglas) to probe the reasons why it achieved such phenomenal sales. He then compares it with Robert Graves' *King Jesus*, which, though a much greater work, was not a success at all. ("There is intellectual and moral and spiritual sinew in Graves's book which makes the best-seller seem vulgar and naive."). And finally, after

GÉRARD TOUGAS

Associate Professor of French in the University of British Columbia

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some despairing looks at the Romantic attitudes of North Americans and the role of the "Yahoo Hero" in modern fiction, he pleads with us to understand and to appreciate the role of literature in the modern world:

This book was not undertaken to explain the world—only to make some comment on literature as it has developed during the past century. But to divorce literature wholly from the world in which it is produced is absurd; it is, indeed, to deny that literature is anything more than a form of entertainment which may, in the hands of finical writers and critics, be lifted to the status of a minor art. But there is nothing minor about it, and when it truly mirrors any part of the soul of the time, it is revelatory and prophetic as nothing else can be in quite the same way.

But no such summary as I have given can really indicate the flavour of the book, or its real values. To appreciate it at all fully one must read it at a leisurely pace so that the joy that is within it can be really tasted and its rich intellectual contents slowly digested. Certainly not many books of like value have appeared in the history of Canadian critical writing, and rarely does such a pleasant critical work appear anywhere. It will surely appeal to nearly all readers who can lay a claim to discrimination and taste in the world of books. They may be irritated (and rightly so) by Mr. Davies' occasional sweeping generalizations, they may take issue with some of his critical evaluations. But the irritations will be offset by the pleasures to be found on almost every page. For Mr. Davies is not only a man possessed of a daemon; he also has at his command an urbane wit, a sharp critical mind, and a vast store of learning, which he carries lightly and on which he draws without ostentation or pedantry.

THE QUALITY OF SPACE

DAVID WALKER. *Where the High Winds Blow*. Collins. \$3.95.

WE HAVE BECOME accustomed in the novels of this century to the shifting quality of time, but the shifting quality of space, while we live with it, is yet strange to us. It is this new element of our everyday lives that David Walker uses with great skill in *Where the High Winds Blow*.

In this novel about Canada, people breakfast in Montreal and have dinner the same day on the shores of the Arctic Ocean. Yet the space which they cover is only a footstep beside the great distance of one hundred and fifty miles by dog-sled in the winter north. It is through such shifting perspectives as this that Mr. Walker creates a fresh and exhilarating vision of this country. We are lifted out of the singular view of the pavements of the East or the prairies of the West to an encompassing view of size, depth, complexity, and vigor. The airplane has burst through the barrier of distance, and Mr. Walker uses this literal fact to bring a new sense of freedom and unity into our living present.

Just as he looks at that which is and sees in it heroic proportions, so Mr. Walker looks at people and sees in them heroic proportions. In fact, Mr. Walker may be said to celebrate the return of

the hero, life-size. A hint of his purpose is given, surprisingly enough, in one of his pieces of light fiction, *Digby*, when one of the characters reflects "how sad it is that the epic poem is never written in this epic age." Since the publication of *Digby* seven years ago, Mr. Walker has obviously been exploring ways in which to express his conception of this century.

He established the pattern for his study of the modern hero in *Harry Black*, published in 1956. He has used that pattern again, both in the plot contours and in the outlines of many of the characters, in *Where the High Winds Blow*. The similarity of the two novels is particularly marked in the hero himself, for Simon Kepple Skafe is, in effect, Harry Black transported from India to Canada and given a different profession. Skafe can be described, as Harry Black is, as a combination of "Al Capone and Good-time Charlie and Sir Galahad". Both are leaders of men, legendary figures, handsome, physically strong, literate, and lonely. Both are honourable (except in the matter of their friends' wives) and ruthless. To both, love is only an episode, an interruption in the pursuit of their dæmons, and for that reason the wives of both men divorce them. Both, however, have "frigid mistresses"—Harry Black's the snow-capped Kachenjunga in the Himalayas, Simon Skafe's the Arctic. Both have protagonists whom they admire and fear: Harry Black's is a man-eating tiger, Simon Skafe's is the north. Both men test their cunning and strength against this protagonist on three occasions, and on the third they both experience a religious conversion which brings them peace and humility.

The difference in their professions, however, is a significant one. The tiger hunting soldier-hero of *Harry Black* is clearly too specialized a figure to be a meaningful hero of an age of great experiment and discovery. Therefore, Simon Skafe is the industrialist-hero, the creative man of action who wants money "to make things with to do things with", a Jason wrestling from the frozen north its treasure of pitchblende, a visionary who sees that "the world is coming North", and who dreams of the day when there will be shipping "by nuclear submarine tanker under the ice-cap".

Just as Simon-Harry-Black-Skafé is Mr. Walker's hero figure, so the two women in the hero's life are Profane and Sacred Love. They appear not only in the two recent novels; they are a standard item in all of Mr. Walker's novels—in his earliest one, *The Storm and the Silence*, and even in the light fiction, *Geordie* and *Digby*. The one is always a sturdy, luscious wench (usually dark) "a queen, a gypsy, a courtesan"; while the other is a slim (usually fair) coolness. In general the hero turns his feet into the path of the slim coolness while at the same time he looks back over his left shoulder. Yet the fair one has him, he is hers. And in case we miss the point, her name in *Harry Black* is Christian, while in *Where the High Winds Blow* it is Grace.

Any assessment of Mr. Walker's serious novels must necessarily be tempered by such heavy-handedness in his symbolism. It can perhaps best be illustrated in the endings, for they have the curious effect, not of expanding the meaning of the novels, but of reducing it. In *The Storm and the Silence*, for instance, the hero meets his demise

skewered on the antlers of a royal stag when he happens to fall into a bog-pit where the animal lies, and there is a similar distasteful shock in the ending of *Where the High Winds Blow*. After an Arctic storm, Simon Skafe crawls out of his tomb-womb—a cleft in the ice of his "frigid mistress"—newborn into religious conviction. The death-and-resurrection theme which is brought in here simply does not fit the rest of the novel. I think it is possible that Mr. Walker has been over-awed by the modern symbolist movement. While it is true that the movement gave a new vigour to writing at the turn of the century, now, a half century later, it has lost most of its virtue and tends to produce simply another kind of literary cliché. It is the very tiredness of many of his symbols that creates in the reader a puzzled disappointment in Mr. Walker's work. I wish he would let his characters come out of the bog-pit and stand on their own meaning. They are sturdy enough to do so.

For apart from the weary symbols, the astonishingly good thing about *Where the High Winds Blow* is that the work as a whole abounds with life. Mr. Walker is, of course, a superb storyteller, and in the moments of crisis—a hurricane on the New Brunswick coast, a strike in a mine, a blizzard in the Barren Lands—we are swept along with the subtly gathering forces to the peaks of exciting climaxes. But there is much more here than just narrative skill, fine as that is. Mr. Walker has also an unusual alertness for the sights and sounds of the land and its creatures, just as he has a lively interest in the people—bush pilots, St. James Street tycoons, the French-Canadian fisherman Roland,

the Eskimo hunter Avakana. Beyond this, he is concerned with "the convolutions and involvements of reason, trifling motive, misconceptions," that lie behind human action, and with "the shades of grey which are the truth" about human beings. This kind of complexity is much more marked, and as a result the characters are much richer, in *Where the High Winds Blow* than in *Harry Black*. Simon Skafe's dark love, for instance, has burst out of her confining symbol to rival the hero in stature and many-sidedness. Her growth is evidence of Mr. Walker's exploring mind which, I feel, is not yet satisfied. In *Where the High Winds Blow* he has created a fascinating work of intricate texture, but this will not be his last work, nor, I think, will it be his best.

MARGARET STOBIE

A COMMONPLACE REGARNISHED

S. MORRIS ENGEL. *The Problem of Tragedy*. Brunswick Press. \$3.50.

FROM THE 81 PAGES which make up Mr. Engel's book we may, indeed ought to in all conscience, subtract the following: 16 pages at the beginning, consisting of blanks, acknowledgement, dedication, title pages, table of contents, foreword, and epigraph; and in the text: 12 pages (out of 18—some of it seems to have been necessary) rehearsing the views on tragedy of Aristotle, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Hume, and Jaspers; 10 pages retelling *The Dيبbek* (including one page on the early fortunes of the play and the life of its author); 3 pages

G. R. STEVENS

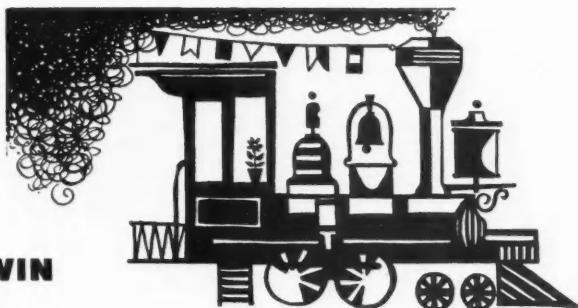
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paraphrasing the stories of Hosea and Job; 2 blank pages; and 2 pages reviewing the *Oresteia* trilogy. This all adds up to 45, a formidable subtrahend which strongly suggests that Mr. Engel, like Chaucer's Sergeant of the Lawe, has "semed bisier than he was." But 36, the arithmetical remainder, is not in itself an unseemly number and may still be enough to provide answers to the problem of tragedy.

The problem of tragedy as Mr. Engel sees it is that "the kind of experience provided by the encounter with tragedy is irrational and founded upon an illusion." What this means, I think, is that tragedy seduces the spectator into believing he understands what the suffering of the hero is all about and why it is inevitable. But, the argument runs (and I think I follow it fairly enough, in spite of the undergrowth), tragedy, considered as it ought to be from within and on its terms, only pretends to, but does not really, explain human suffering. The appearance of causality in the tragic conflict, the appearance of reason and logic behind man's woe, is appearance only. The conclusion then is unavoidable: "Although tragedy does confront us . . . with a mystery, this mystery is not Dionysus [Nietzsche], not Will [Schopenhauer] not the Absolute [Hegel] but simply the mystery of human suffering, and before it art fares no better than science, philosophy or religion." This is not to say, Mr. Engel rightly cautions us, that to become aware of the illusion in tragedy is to cease to be enchanted by tragedy. What it does indicate is that the consciousness of the failure of tragedy to provide answers is "the only *real* piece of knowledge" gained by the spectator.

To answer this last sally, I shall only pause to throw at Mr. Engel his own phrase "a higher rationality" with all that such a phrase should suggest to him but apparently does not. But the main weakness in his argument, as argument, lies elsewhere, namely in his super-rational refusal, delivered with a strange sense of nostalgia or disappointment, to allow a system or world-view even in the work itself to provide the answer to the tragic question. Of course art is not Revelation. Of course no ultimate solution to the predicament of existence is possible without recourse to a theory or a philosophical attitude. Is this not the great disillusionment, if not the great *éclaircissement*, of life itself? Surely what Mr. Engel has examined here, sometimes quite eloquently, is the most basic of commonplaces, the one commonplace which emerges, or should emerge, from every sophomore bull session. But perhaps it is salutary occasionally to have the great commonplaces regarnished for us and served up in small books.

S. WARHAFT

THE WITCH WITHIN

MARIE-CLAIRE BLAIS, *Mad Shadows (La Belle Bête*, translated by Merloyd Lawrence). McClelland and Stewart. Cloth \$3.50; paper, \$1.95.

BEFORE FINISHING the first chapter of this novel, I had that sinking feeling all composition teachers have experienced reading the intensely subjective outpourings of an adolescent mind. But by the

time I had read half of the book, I was caught in the world created by the author's nineteen-year-old imagination. She had proved the validity of Conrad's stricture on the Romantic sensibility, that it must "in the destructive element immerse". Miss Blais has plunged into her nature and written a parable out of what she discovered there. Like other figurative narratives, this novel can be understood on more than one level. A religious-provincial interpretation appeared last summer in *The Tamarack Review*.

The reader who is not familiar with Catholicism in Quebec may be pardoned if he finds other modes of appreciation. Freud, for instance, would appreciate the mother's love for her idiot son, and the daughter's hatred of both, not to mention her idealization of her dead father: "Far off in her childhood, she

could see her father, the austere peasant, the maker of bread. When he tilled the virgin loins of the earth, he was penetrating to the heart of God." The daughter's concern with the farm and with making bread become in this light perhaps a little too obvious, as are many of the motifs that run through the novel. But like Emily Brontë, though Miss Blais may tell, she never explains. As a result *Mad Shadows* has the convincing irrationality and vivid detail of a dream (and dreams are frequently mentioned in it). Fortunately it also has an imagistic complexity and unity of purpose which elevate it to the realm of art. Its many striking scenes convince, not as having been recreated from observed outer reality, but as having been created for the first time from felt inner reality.

A single strand will have to suffice as

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a sample of the figurative quality of the narrative. Because of the daughter's relation with her mother, she is governed by "passions that seethed within her. Wickedness was her second self; she was like those beings who lead two separate lives, one by day, and a more sinister one by night." The wrong attempt at solution of the problem is simple escape. In Chapter 1 the reader is told she is ugly; Chapter 6 begins "In the middle of the night she suddenly turned over in bed and felt consumed with pleasure, imagining that she was beautiful." She goes to a dance and meets a beautiful, blind young man with "pure-white hair". She falls in love and entrances him, partly by telling him she is beautiful. They marry, but when her husband regains his vision, he leaves her.

The woman, Isabelle-Marie, goes back to live with her mother and brother. "Her soul withered . . . She was growing thinner, uglier, as crabbed as an old witch." After this description it is not surprising that a few pages later she finally gives vent to her hatred of her brother, Patrice, by tempting him to get his face over a pan full of water.

Her hand hesitated in midair and then, triumphant, it plunged Patrice's head into the boiling water. This hand was as strong as a claw and Patrice, who did not even cry out, was taken unawares as a human sacrifice. After her impulse had been satisfied, Isabelle-Marie went down the dark stairs leading to a part of the house which had been closed since the death of her father.

Here, as frequently in the novel, what seems perverse is in reality a necessary purging, a preparation for something positive: "Shaking off the deathly burden which has oppressed her for so long, Isabelle-Marie finally began to breathe

freely." No longer under a compulsion to be a witch to Patrice, "she now baked bread for him, made up his bed with clean sheets, and let him wander with the horses." But she is unable to come to terms with her mother, Louise, who finally orders her out of the house. Later she returns and acts out the second and unredeeming half of her destructive role: "Isabelle-Marie hurled the lantern into the driest sheaves of straw. She thought that it was Louise's land that she was destroying but suddenly she realized that it was God's land."

The light and the dark, the witch and the provider, the fire and the water are images capable of enlargement. Miss Blais has linked them with others equally suggestive—the sun and blood, the mirror and the lake, the green and dark of the woods. They interweave in patterns controlled by an imagination which the sympathetic reader must admire. Striking and readable, *Mad Shadows* is an impressive first novel.

ELLIOTT GOSE

THE EVER-BEARING CHRONICLE

MAZO DE LA ROCHE. *Morning at Jalna*. Macmillan. \$3.50.

MORNING AT JALNA is the sixteenth volume of the Whiteoak family chronicle, apart from the author's successful three-act play published in 1936. Although Mazo de la Roche has also published fully as many books *not* concerned with the Whiteoaks, her reputation as novelist will continue to be linked with the family she has made known throughout the world. If *Morning at Jalna* can-

not diminish that reputation, it certainly offers nothing to increase it.

Chronologically this novel becomes the second in the series, preceded only by *The Building of Jalna* (1944), one of the best books of the whole sixteen. The events in *Morning at Jalna* take place about 1863—ten years after those in *The Building of Jalna*. There still remains a thirty-year gap in the family history, since the next novel, *Mary Wakefield* (1949), is set in the year 1893.

Miss de la Roche's fertility in the invention of incidents has always been remarkable, and at least quantitatively there is no falling off in *Morning at Jalna*. A few episodes—particularly the boating expedition of the three children—are developed with characteristic verve and vividness of detail, but too many are so scantily treated that one

wonders if the author just got tired of them. For example, the comic potentialities in the pursuit, capture, marriage, and escape of Lucius Madigan are disposed of in a few summary pages. Something similar seems to have happened with what appeared to be the central theme of the novel—the appearance at Jalna of a slave-owning family from the American South. That the impact on Canada of the American Civil War is only lightly portrayed may be regretted as a lost opportunity, but a more serious defect is the huddled-up conclusion of this part of the narrative. Everyone at Jalna is delighted when at last Lucy Sinclair is hurriedly bundled off with her blacks and baggage, and the author herself seems no less glad. The Whiteoaks had never solved the problems created by the presence of Sinclair; now

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they could just drop the subject. Miss de la Roche also drops the subject, even though the reader is left puzzled about how Curtis Sinclair, earlier reported as captured by the Northerners and in danger of imminent execution as a secret agent, not only escapes that fate but is able to reappear in the final chapter fully restored to wealth and social position.

Adeline, the eventual centenarian, appears in *Morning at Jalna* as a paler character than a reader would expect from his acquaintance with her elsewhere in the saga; her greatest moments were either behind her or ahead of her. The most vividly realized character in this novel is the half-breed Titus Sharrow, whose bland French-Indian exterior conceals a ferment of ambitious schemes, amorous, artistic, and financial. This outwardly diffident young Canadian, in pursuit of his own mysterious purposes, outmanœuvres everyone else, whether British-born or American-born, child or adult, black or white. His morals are far from admirable by any standards except his own, but he is clearly alive. He also appeared occasionally in *The Building of Jalna*, without being so fully characterized. I for one hope we shall yet see more of him.

R. E. WATTERS

A SEARCH FOR ROOTS

ELI MANDEL. *Fuseli Poems*. Contact Press. \$2.00.

PETER BYRNE. *Once & Some Words Between the Minutes*. Editions Quartz. (Address: 474 de la Lorraine, Montreal.) \$1.50.

IN HIS EDITORIAL to the first number of *Alphabet* James Reaney refers to the in-

numerable literary gatherings he can remember in which "the Fall" was the main subject of discussion. What struck me in this, as I said to a Montreal poet, was that I cannot remember a single meeting in Montreal from 1940 to 1960 in which this was a subject of serious discussion. The difference between "the Montreal school"—from Scott and Klein to Purdy and Cohen—and the poets of Toronto—from Pratt and Finch to Reaney and Jay Macpherson—is starkly revealed by the contrast.

Eli Mandel clearly belongs with the Montrealers: a few of the poems are practically parodies of Layton, e.g., "The Dialogue of Last Mountain Lake", "Map of Love", and "In the Caves of My City". But he is also embroiled in metaphysical problems of the "dualist" Toronto type (*vide* "Biopsy"), and studying Frye, he has bitten off a good deal of Blake and Yeats, so that the difference between the "schools" begins to be blurred.

The fact is that since about 1950 Canadian poets and poetasters have been concerned with metaphysics, directly or implicitly, in a way that was quite unknown to the socially-conscious poetry movement preceding. It could easily be argued that political leftism was replaced by a troubled metaphysical questioning here just as it was in England.

In Eli Mandel this theme originates in personal anguish and culminates in cosmic agony:

Read in the water how a drowning man
sings of a free green life.

He writes then his "Mr. Mandel's Sunday Service":

I have heard singing and thought how
singing maddens the singers because their

mouths are open in a shriek and the strained muscles of the faces pull down the eyes in a clown's cry This cosmic song was sung my murderous friends by you who raped the bear's girl before you hurled her in the pit and you in whom the stake is never still.

One could go to some length to demonstrate how this poetry expands on a view of life as an ordeal in an intolerable limbo (pp. 32, 31), an unredeemable place of suffering, where love and reason carry on a futile dialectic (pp. 13, 44), where any possible God is absent or invisible (p. 12). It is rhetorical poetry like George Barker's in his ranting early style (not his formal best); and it records a transitional turmoil of philosophical anguish and personal despair. Essentially tragic, it is somewhat purified and lifted above the chaos of actuality by the will of the poet and his

feeling for language. The poem on Wallace Stevens, despite its sceptical negations that out-do Stevens, is as crisp and detailed in its phrasing as the master himself.

Peter Byrne's book, though it is a small one, is not to be therefore underrated. It is an odd and beautiful piece of prose writing, in English, published by a French group in Montreal. The influence here comes from France—sometimes the English reads almost like translation, e.g., "only what lacks is real"—but the "theological ideas" are really on the same plane as Eli Mandel's. This in fact is the characteristic French would-be comic statement of the same human condition, a sort of Chaplinesque pathos showing the individual within "that tremendous absence" . . . against "the empty sky" . . . "a great painless

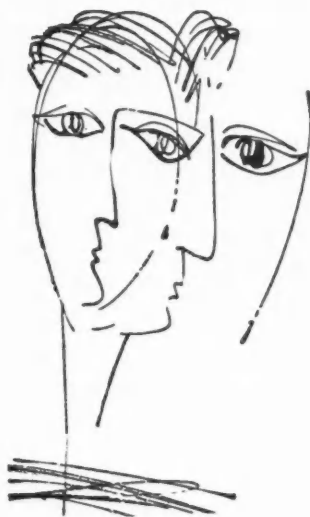
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silence".

It is an amusing book, and a painful one (we are not yet in that painless silence) that I would greatly recommend to the amateur of Canadiana. Coming from a young man, it is Existentialism in a minor and personal mode, but perfectly authentic. How differently from the English writer he writes of isolation: "Still assuming that the lack of communication was somehow my fault I struggled so hard to overcome it that my nerves got the best of me and, to my surprise, I found I had my hands on my fellow actor's neck, strangling him! But I had a further surprise. Apparently he had felt the same impulse at the same time and was strangling me! I realized that this simultaneity would be the only agreement we would ever reach and thenceforth considered all the other actors as simply inexistent insofar as this was compatible with all of us being on the same stage and performing in whatever this is together."

Obviously, we need to think through some elementary philosophical problems, as Plato would have said. Both religion and art are the flowering of science and philosophy; i.e., the state of knowledge and thought always provides the ground in which religion and poetic imagination find their roots, religion being the popular or universal form of imagination (i.e., religion is bad poetry) and poetry itself the particular, more speculative, more complex and adventurous form (poetry is the highest religion). Our poets, like those of Europe, have discovered that they were living and thinking in mid-air, and now they are trying to find roots which neither science nor religion is at the moment equipped to provide.

LOUIS DUDEK

THE SEAS OF FAIRYLAND

FRANK NEWFELD. *The Princess of Tomboso*. Oxford. \$2.50.

ANNE WILKINSON. *Swann and Daphne*. Oxford. \$2.50.

TOO OFTEN nowadays the writer of children's books is so tenderly concerned about the susceptibilities of his young audience that his work becomes a bland, innocuous, unexciting dish of pabulum. Avoid trauma at all costs! In my son John's copy of *The Gingerbread Man* the author assures us, when the fox with a final snip-snap gobbles up the last quarter of the runaway, that after all Gingerbread Men are *meant* to be eaten. A great deal of contemporary children's literature smells too obviously of the psychological clinic; it is over-scrupulous, inhibited and consequently lacking in gusto, humour and excitement.

It is refreshing, therefore, to find in *The Princess of Tomboso* the magic, the charm, the forthrightness of Anderson. This story, a translation of a French-Canadian fairy tale, makes use of familiar, but always effective devices: objects having magical properties; a hero; a cruel, wicked Princess; overwhelming odds for our hero to surmount. The story moves along at an admirable pace; the magic is pure and astounding; the hero is properly heroic; the cruel Princess is punished for her wickedness by being left at the end of the story with a nose a foot long disfiguring her once beautiful features. Serves her right!

No attempt has been made to palliate the cruelty or violence. "The King's soldiers rushed to the room and captured Jacques and beat him nearly to death

and flung him out the window. For five days and nights Jacques lay in the ditch unconscious." Our hero, however, survives this and worse, and if Jacques can take it, so, I imagine, can my son John.

The compact text is admirably complemented by Newfeld's charming and lively illustrations, many in gay, eye-catching colours. These, like the story itself, retain the fairy-tale quality of remoteness in time and place.

Anne Wilkinson's *Swann and Daphne* is intended for children somewhat older, from, I would say, ten to twelve years. It is a humourless, melancholy story, rather ponderously academic in its attempt to mingle the traditions of nineteenth-century fairy lore with Greek myth and transplant the whole to the very realistic contemporary setting, television studio and all. It is a book written

for children by an adult adult; contrived, tidy, studied. The elements of the narrative which ought to provide the delight of magic are unconvincing and the incidents which comprise the plot are lacking in interest and excitement.

Swann and Daphne appear out of nowhere in place of a swan and a birch tree which also appear out of nowhere. "... two fat babies rolled on the grass beside the pool." Swann, has feathers on his head, and Daphne birch leaves on hers. They are adopted by the Whites (birdwatchers) and the Greens (gardeners). Eventually, in spite of the parents' protectiveness, the children are subjected to life outside their homes. They suffer jeers at school, then adulation; they suffer stardom on a television programme; they suffer the discomfort of hair wigs. Eventually, they admit

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defeat and run away together. They live idyllically on the shores of a lake until the arrival of a flock of swans. In the depth of his being Swann recognizes his kinship with the birds and, riding upon the back of one, he flies away from his beloved Daphne. Griefstricken, the girl roots herself on the shore of the lake and fulfils her destiny by becoming a tree like her namesake in Greek myth. Twice a year the swans pass over the lake, and among them is Swann, now completely transformed. He pauses briefly to visit Daphne. "He sings and whistles and wraps his feathers round her thin white bark, and Daphne bends down her branches and embraces him." As a result of these two brief meetings per year they "live happily ever after". These inevitable words rather incredibly bring the story to an end.

The seas of fairyland are indeed perilous if we try to navigate them in twentieth-century powerboats; it would be safer, I think, to trust ourselves to a nutshell and let the seas take us where they will.

J. DE BRUYN

A STUDY OF IMAGES

GERARD BESSETTE, *Les images en poésie canadienne-française*. Editions Beauchemin.

PROFESSOR BESSETTE, already well-known in French Canada as a poet and novelist, has given us in this volume a stimulating and original study of French-Canadian poetry. Although not without shortcomings, this tropological study of nine French-Canadian poets (Crémazie, Fréchette, Beauchemin, Gill, Desaulniers,

Choquette, Morin, DesRochers and Nelligan) presents a fresh approach to their work and offers as a bonus a wealth of provocative observations about both French and French-Canadian poetry in general.

The book is divided into four sections. The first chapter, "Les différentes sortes de tropes", provides a system of classification that takes as its starting point Dumarsais' eighteenth-century *Traité des tropes*. Bessette recognizes five basic tropes: (1) comparisons, both general and specific; (2) metaphors, both simple and compound, the latter sub-divided into substantival, verbal, and adjectival-adverbial types; (3) assimilations, which are copulative, appositive or expletive; (4) symbols, defined (p. 39) as "une métaphore obscure, qui, au lieu de n'avoir qu'un premier terme, en compte plusieurs, entre lesquels le second terme semble hésiter, mais qu'il suggère tous"; and (5) visions, "la figure par laquelle le poète affirme ou laisse entendre qu'il rêve (ou a rêvé), qu'il imagine, qu'il a une vision, qu'il fait un souhait, etc." (p. 40). Five secondary types of images are also defined: personification, transposition (which includes synesthesia and concretization), ascending, horizontal and descending comparisons.

The second chapter, "L'évolution des tropes en poésie française", undertakes to apply this system of classification to the figures used by French poets from Corneille to Valéry, in order to show the evolution towards "modernité". There is no indication why Corneille and Valéry were chosen as the limits of the experiment and the reader is left to conclude that modernity is somehow related to Mallarmean symbolism. Numerous statistical tables are included, giving totals

and percentages of each type and sub-type of figure in a sample passage of the work of the particular poet under consideration. One gathers from a foot-note on page 53 that the sample consisted of 750 lines of verse, although the Corneille and Racine samples apparently included twice this number of lines. There is no explanation why 750 lines was decided on as the base, or what means was taken to secure a "representative sampling". In fact, the whole statistical apparatus is disappointing; there is, for example, no criterion of significant variation, and Corneille with 65 tropes and Racine with 101 are thrown together in the same table as "classiques". Despite the unsatisfactoriness of the statistical approach, this chapter, like the others, rewards the careful reader with numerous incidental observations which arouse him either to indignant protest or to further investigation.

In the third section, "Les tropes en poésie canadienne-française", the principal French-Canadian poets from Crémazie to DesRochers (except Nelligan, who has a chapter to himself) are then analyzed by the statistical method used in the previous chapter. Fortunately the scope of the studies is here frequently enlarged: "nous devons souvent quitter le point de vue tropologique pour entrer en des détails plus spécifiques" (p. 99), and thus we have a systematic re-examination of French-Canadian poetry from 1850 to 1933. The final chapter contains an extended analysis of the poetry of Nelligan, undertaken quite independently of Professor Paul Wyczynski's *Emile Nelligan: sources et originalité de son œuvre*, which was published at about the same time.

Professor Bessette does not set out to

turn our views of French-Canadian poetry upside down, and he does not do so. By his original and painstaking investigation, however, he confirms a number of traditional evaluations and invites a re-appraisal of certain aspects of the work of the principal older poets; he also leaves his reader with the conviction that tropological studies can be a useful tool for research in Canadian literature. There can be no doubt that his book deserves the attention of every serious reader of French-Canadian poetry.

DAVID M. HAYNE

THE POLITICAL PERSONALITY

LORD BEAVERBROOK, *Politicians and the War, 1914-1916*. British Book Service. \$3.50.

In 1928, Lord Beaverbrook published a book, *Politicians and the War*, which covered the period from August 1914 to the summer of 1916. The study was completed in 1932 to include the complex negotiations leading to the second Coalition Government in December 1916, when Lloyd George became Prime Minister. The whole work has now been reprinted in one volume, and despite the number of books that exist on the First World War, it is still the most studied and analytical account of the secret springs in English politics during those crucial years.

One theme emerges above all others throughout the book—the problem of combining effective leadership with stable cabinet government. This was not easy, certainly not nearly so easy as in the Second World War. Party divisions had been strained almost to breaking

over the Parliament Act, Home Rule, and the vindictive speeches of Lloyd George. Once the war had begun, the Liberals were handicapped by an Opposition so embittered that coalition seemed hardly possible. Yet, from the very nature of the crisis, some reconciliation had to come if the war were to be guided by a cabinet both united and accepted by parliament.

Beaverbrook does not so much develop this idea directly, as illustrate it by dwelling with almost clinical interest on the relations among the most powerful men in the two parties. First there was the clash between Churchill and Lord Fisher at the Admiralty, so serious that it led to the resignation of Fisher and the formation of the first Coalition, without Churchill. The new government was held together by Asquith, to whom the traditional Conservatives gravitated more easily than to their own party leader. Asquith represented political unity, but his handling of the war revealed an "inveterate procrastinator". The author makes it clear, however, that the matter went deeper—to the lack of any precedent in cabinet organization which could deal with total war. According to Beaverbrook, two men provided the answer above all others: Bonar Law and Lloyd George.

Beaverbrook's attachment to Bonar Law was born of their common Canadian origin and confirmed by the struggle over the leadership of the Conservative party in 1911, which had been managed more by Max Aitken, as Beaverbrook then was, than by anyone else. He admired Law's capacity for precise, detached thinking on political problems, his integrity and sense of duty. The sketches of the dour and cautious Con-

servative leader are among the most vivid in the book, although the descriptions of Lloyd George come a close second. They were a remarkable contrast. When they joined to form the second Coalition in 1916, Bonar Law never lost his mistrust of the Prime Minister, but he gave him such complete loyalty and co-operation that the work of politics could be carried on without serious blunders, leaving Lloyd George free to guide the War Cabinet.

What Beaverbrook does not say directly is that the negotiations leading to the second Coalition were made possible largely because of his own initiative. The immediacy of his analysis comes from the notes which he made at the time as the hidden political manipulator. These notes had what he himself called a "photographic" quality, and his camera was often a subjective one. His judgments make it clear that he was drawn instinctively to self-made men, or to men with a bold and adventurous flair. It is



striking how often he interprets their ambition in terms of duty or self-abnegation and assesses his own love of political intrigue in terms of national necessity. Even his more trivial judgments are revealing, as when he suggests an ordinary note from Lloyd George might rank with the Gettysburg address, or when he dismisses Churchill's painting as a "calm amusement." But these are mere threads, woven into a whole that will remain a minor classic for both Englishmen and Canadians as long as they are interested in the political personality within the structure of cabinet government.

A. V. TUCKER

ORDEALS AND REWARDS

RALPH GUSTAFSON. *Rocky Mountain Poems*. Klanak Press. \$1.75.

RALPH GUSTAFSON's ordeals by mountains, undergone during a climbing tour of the Rockies, and his consequent rewards, are recorded for us in *Rocky Mountain Poems*. The obstacles he encountered were inevitable; stones on the path, mud, muskeg, mosquitoes, were to be expected. The obstacles his poems provide, however, are not essential.

A major problem arises from an over-consciousness of what he is doing—writing poetry—which tempts him to prosaic anti-pedantic asides. Take "On Mountain Summit." Having told us he and his girl "picked flowers . . . / the scarlet paintbrush / White heart and pink heather / True yarrow lupin", he reminds himself that lists are "always / poor kickbacks in poems". Now, first, we'd like to be out of the study or chalet and back on the

path, picking; and, second, we don't agree; we remember Shakespeare's sixty-sixth sonnet, Milton's "Rocks, Caves, Lakes, Fens, Bogs, Dens and shades of death". Nor it is easy to see how Mr. Gustafson can back up his statement without damning his own poems.

It is understandable that, to get the stark mountains across, Mr. Gustafson should employ simple language; it is heartening that in this he often succeeds. When this simplicity is coupled with a manner reminiscent of Anglo-Saxon and Icelandic poetry ("Icarus and Mallory / Lacked luck and were legend"), it provides the rippling muscular imagery of "Mountains / Tipped over morning, tree trunks / Trimmed the sun to dazzle, we tripped / On ragged dapple", and of these passages from "In the Valley of Wenkemna:

Spunsilkengreen
It hovered,
Bit the flower;
And went . . .

This was high
In the mountains
Of hemlock
And rushing
Marbled,
Rockflour creeks.

Unfortunately, plain speakers sometimes become vague. After taking the trouble to delight us with a "spunsilken-green" hummingbird, Mr. Gustafson can only say of the forest in "The Walk in Yoho Valley" that it was "green, / Green and silence", of the forest seen "In the Yukon" that it was "green, / Green hangings", of Laughter Falls that they were "cold as all get-out among green". The multitudinous forest colours go unqualified; by his failure to avail himself of adjectives to shade in the noun's outlines, he gives us a surfeit of greens. This

wrong sort of simplicity which is mental sloth informs us that he came up "the surest way, each foot / Alternatively ahead", that he put the flowers he picked in an *empty* jamjar, that the "lupin which follows / The sun" has "foliage [which] folds / At night".

But I have strayed from the trail of his style to pick wild tautologies. Let me express gratitude for the rewards poems like "The Walk in Yoho Valley" and "In the Valley of Wenckhemna" offer, for lines like "ten thousand flowers, an alpine / tumbling of them", and "Hoodooed Baker floated; we had seen / Her grounded the crown all glow". They are worth coming all the stony way for.

DAVID BROMIGE

SHORT REVIEWS

OF THE FRESH batch of titles in McClelland & Stewart's New Canadian Library, the most welcome is undoubtedly the translation of Ringue's classic and penetrating novel of rural Quebec, *Thirty Acres* (\$1.25). Morley Callaghan is represented by one of his best novels, *More Joy in Heaven* (\$1.00), and Stephen Leacock makes a third appearance in the series with *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (\$1.00), whose rare mingling of the milk of human kindness with the lemon juice of satire is as irresistible as ever. The other two volumes are Ralph Connor's *The Man from Glengarry* (\$1.25) and Gwethalyn Graham's *Earth and High Heaven* (\$1.00).

The Man from Glengarry poses the question of just what we are to expect before we dub a book "Canadian classic". It is not great literature; it does not even

present a plausible series of events. Its epic violence, its extravagant pietism and its Daisy Ashford glimpses into wealthy life present a picture of the Canadian past in which the clouds of grandiose myth are every now and again swept aside to give us a sharp vignette of life in action: a sugaring-off party, a wake among Highland emigrants, a revival meeting in the backwoods—the things that Connor really knew. But, though *The Man from Glengarry* may not present a reliable document of life in the past, it does give us an extraordinary view of the Canadian mind at the time when this book was a best-seller; for this reason alone, it is fascinating and perhaps a little disturbing.

In *Earth and High Heaven*, which aroused considerable attention when it first appeared in 1944, Gwethalyn Graham wrote a novel on the subject of racial discrimination in modern Canada. Her message is one that should have been told, but perhaps not as she has told it. For the novel wears poorly. The theme is so inadequately assimilated, so woodenly presented in didactic dialogue and soliloquy, that both message and novel fail in the end to convince. Like gentlemen, good novelists never tell; they leave one to find out.

* * *

AMONG THE curious, unclassifiable, but interesting volumes that come to an editor's desk is *The Face of Toronto* (Oxford, \$3.00), a volume of sometimes beautiful and often devastating architectural and topographical photographs of Toronto by Ralph Greenhill; Alan Gowans has introduced them by an essay on the city's styles of building.

G. W.

CANADIAN LITERATURE - 1960



A CHECKLIST EDITED BY INGLIS F. BELL

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compiled by Inglis F. Bell

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